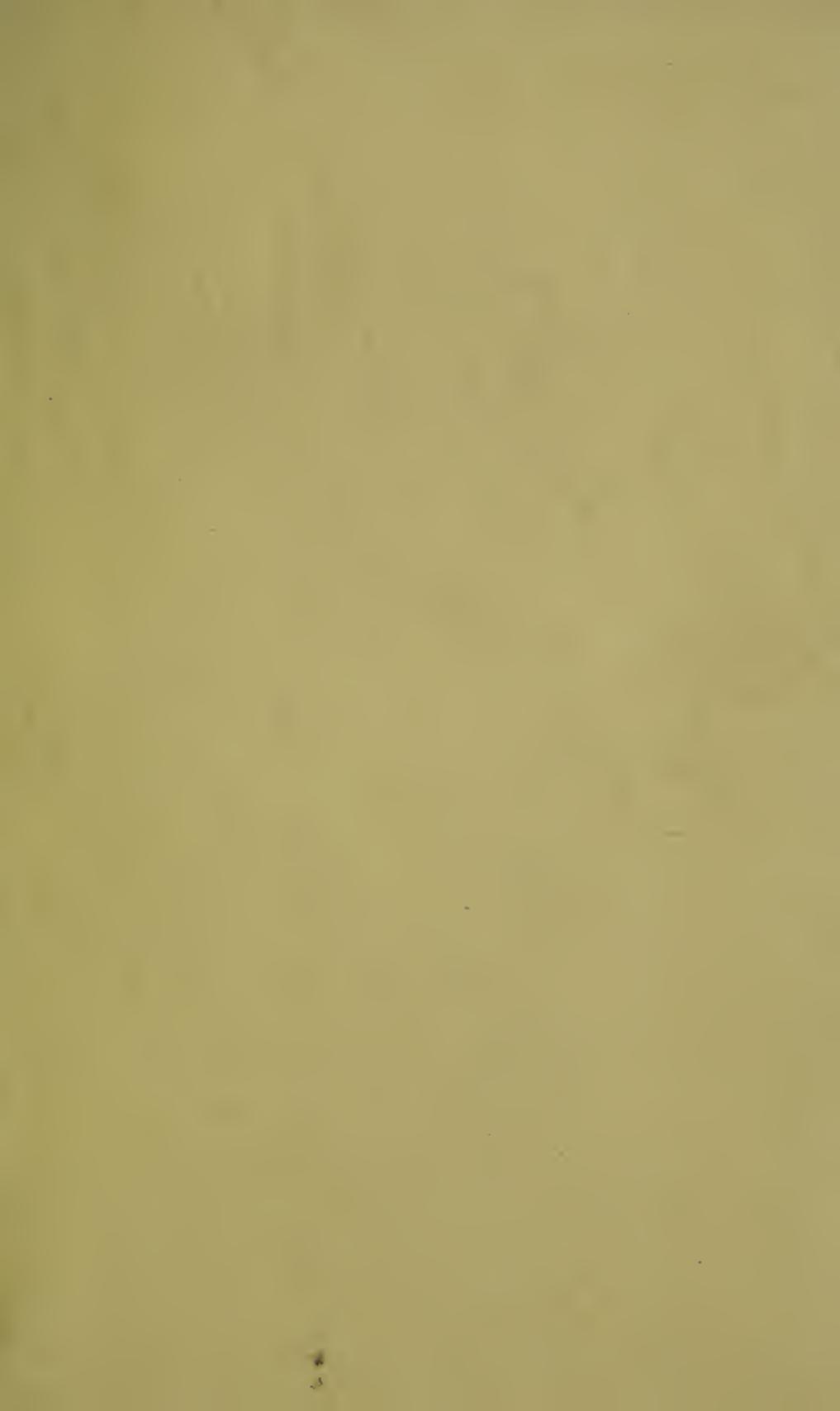




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THE RESCUE.

LORD FITZWARINE.

BY

“SCRUTATOR,”

AUTHOR OF “THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS,”
“THE SQUIRE OF BEECHWOOD,” ETC.



P. 69.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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LORD FITZWARINE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a close sultry evening in July 18—, when a travelling chariot, containing two cavalry officers, was slowly ascending a long, steep hill, in one of the northern counties of England, on the high road leading from the old borough town of Heddington to Stanmore. The reeking sides and jaded appearance of the horses gave evidence of the oppressive heat of the day, as well as of the pace with which they had already passed over twelve miles of ground, and two more yet lay before them ere they could reach Forest Lodge, the

residence of Mrs. Seaton, to which our travellers were journeying.

Colonel Herbert and Major Sinclair had been attached friends for many years, and fellow-comrades in the same regiment during the Peninsular war. Both had fought also in that bloody and hardly contested battle on the plains of Waterloo, where so many of their brave soldiers were laid low. Some few years had passed since that event, and they were now travelling together on a visit to their relatives in the North. Major Sinclair had reached his thirty-fifth year ; he was tall in stature, standing over six feet, and well-proportioned, although of rather spare than robust frame, possessing fine manly features, with eyes expressive of a reflective and sedate turn of mind. Colonel Herbert had passed his fortieth year, and although not so tall, exhibited much more goodly proportions than his friend, with a handsome countenance, rather florid complexion, and very dark brown hair, slightly silvered.

Sinclair, observing the distressed condition of the two unhappy posters, which no efforts

of the postilion could now induce to mend their pace, exclaimed, “Come, Herbert, let us get out and stretch our legs a little up this hill, to save these poor brutes straining theirs so much the more, with our heavy weight inside.”

“Agreed, Sinclair,” replied his friend, “provided we take our time; or, with my ponderous carcass, I shall not be presentable to your fair Cousin Florence, after toiling up this steep ascent; and as first impressions are more than half the battle in love-affairs, I don’t wish to appear in her presence with a face like a full-blown peony, and my fine locks straight and streaming, as that clod’s in yonder hay-field, who looks as if he had just emerged from the river. By the way, Sinclair, you may as well, to beguile the *tedium viæ*, relate that oft-promised tale of poor Seaton’s marriage, by which he gained a wife, but lost his life.”

“Well, Herbert, trusting in your honour and discretion, you shall hear all I know of this romantic and melancholy affair. Miss Dallas (now Mrs. Seaton), and her husband, whom you

may remember serving with us in Spain, had been known to each other from childhood (their parents residing in the same neighbourhood), and had, without their knowledge, when very young (the lady just fifteen, and Seaton only two years her senior), formed an attachment for each other, which on his part proved most devoted, although, from her extreme youth, it does not appear to have been so deeply reciprocated on the young lady's side; in fact, no actual avowal of his love had been as yet made by Seaton, when he was suddenly ordered to join his regiment for foreign service. Miss Dallas was at that time one of the most lovely girls I have ever seen, and you can judge partly for yourself, as she is still a very beautiful woman; and it appears she had attracted the attentions of an elderly gentleman named Bosanquet, a bachelor, who resided with his mother and two maiden sisters at Milton Court, a magnificent place in the same neighbourhood. Mr. Bosanquet was about your age, very gentlemanly and talented, although not so good-looking as Colonel Herbert, but of a most kind, benevo-

lent disposition, and the possessor of immense wealth. For the first time in his life, he became desperately enamoured with Miss Dallas, then, in comparison with himself, a mere child ; but finding every effort to subdue his flame ineffectual, which, from the great disparity of years between them, he felt almost ashamed to confess, after six months' deliberation, he laid open the state of his heart and of his finances to Mrs. Dallas, with the offer of a magnificent settlement on her daughter, if she could be persuaded to accept him. Mrs. Dallas, having been left in not very affluent circumstances at her husband's decease, readily availed herself of this opportunity of securing for her only child so desirable an establishment in life, and without hesitation at once accepted Mr. Bosanquet's proposal, without deeming it necessary to consult her daughter's inclinations on so momentous a subject. In short, it must be confessed that Mrs. Dallas was rather an imperious mother, and her poor child kept in such subjection that she durst not in anything oppose her will. Moreover, love, in its

true intensity, had never entered the heart of Mary Dallas, who regarded Henry Seaton rather as a dear brother; and Mr. Bosanquet, from his kind, affable manner, had so far ingratiated himself into her favour, as to have become a most welcome visitor at her mother's house. Under these circumstances, it was no very difficult task for Mrs. Dallas (pointing out to her daughter the great advantages she would obtain by accepting Mr. Bosanquet) to induce her to lend a favourable ear to his addresses. She would be mistress of his beautiful place, with carriages, horses, and servants at her own disposal, with every luxury and comfort wealth could command, and would be the envy of all the unmarried ladies in the neighbourhood. The prospect was too alluring to this young, unsophisticated girl to be rejected; and, as an earnest of her elderly lover's devotion, presents of jewelry and costly ornaments were almost showered down for her acceptance. She was overwhelmed, if not overcome, by the weight and value of trinkets of every description, and, like a child sated with toys, knew not which

to admire most, and the donor was, of course, lauded to the skies by her mother. I need not stop to criticize the indelicacy of Mr. Bosanquet, or the want of maternal feeling in Mrs. Dallas, by using these unfair influences upon this youthful and unsuspecting girl, to whom the responsibilities and duties of marriage were as yet a sealed book. She was to be led a blindfold victim to the altar, sacrificed to the passions of the one, and the worldly views of the other.

“A few days before the marriage was to take place, Seaton returned invalided to England, and on landing met a friend, who gave him the first intelligence of Mary Dallas’s engagement to his rich rival; and, with his natural impetuosity, he started instantly for Mrs. Dallas’s house. On his arrival there, his worst fears were realized; everything was prepared for the wedding, of which, and her daughter’s brilliant prospects, Mrs. Dallas spoke in terms which sent daggers through young Seaton’s heart. He was staggered, but not diverted from his purpose, and waiting his opportunity, sought Mary Dallas alone in a

small room, which had been appropriated to her own use. Here, kneeling at her feet, he poured forth his long pent-up feelings of love, imploring her not to doom the companion of her childhood and friend of her youth to hopeless misery, by marrying another. She listened in silence for some time to his wild, passionate declarations, which seemed for the first time to have struck a corresponding chord in her own heart, and as she gazed on the handsome youth kneeling before her, the tears trickled down her face, which she in vain attempted to conceal.

“ ‘Oh ! Henry,’ she exclaimed, ‘why this confession now, when it comes too late ? I dare not disobey my mother, and poor Mr. Bosanquet, who has ever been so kind, were I to break my engagement at this last moment, it would break his heart.’

“ ‘And yet,’ exclaimed Seaton, rising indignantly, ‘you would, without hesitation, break the heart of him who has loved you ever since we played together as children in this room, and whose love for you has grown with his growth, and strengthened with his

strength, until it has become a part of his very existence. For you—for Mary Dallas, I have fought and bled to bring home trophies, and lay them at her feet ;' and he produced two medals from his breast, and placed them in her hands.

“ Mary cast her eyes from these proofs of her lover’s valour to the ground, and sat speechless, not daring to give utterance to her true feelings. Seaton saw the working of her heart, and, seizing her hand, said impressively—

“ ‘ Mary, this hand shall never belong to another whilst Henry Seaton lives. I have sworn it shall be so ; now, choose between us, and quickly too, as time presses ; my life is in your hands, and if you do not give up Mr. Bosanquet, I will never quit this room alive.’

“ ‘ Oh ! Henry, say not so ! pray do not speak so vehemently ; give me time to consider —let us consult mamma.’

“ ‘ Never !’ he exclaimed furiously, ‘ your own lips shall pronounce my doom. Speak one word only—Will you resign Mr. Bosanquet ?—Yes or no.’

“ ‘ Oh Henry ! ’ she faintly said, falling back upon the sofa, and covering her face with her hands, ‘ I dare not do so now—it is indeed too late.’

“ ‘ Then you have sealed Henry Seaton’s death-warrant,’ he exclaimed fiercely, and snatching a pistol from his bosom, discharged it into his left breast.

“ Mary Dallas sprung from her seat, and catching her falling lover in her arms, with a shriek that pierced through the house, sank senseless by his side, her dress saturated with his blood. The whole household was alarmed by the report of the pistol, and, with Mrs. Dallas at their head, rushed into the room. Their horror at discovering the two lifeless bodies, as they then appeared, may be imagined; but the truth flashed at once across the mind of the almost frantic mother, and being a woman of strong nerve, she lost no time in vain lamentations. Mary was immediately carried to her room by the women-servants, where, by restoratives, she soon revived, and Henry Seaton was laid on the sofa by a faithful old soldier servant, who, accustomed

to gun-shot wounds, used his best endeavours to staunch the blood ; whilst Mrs. Dallas ran to the stable-yard and sent off the groom for the village surgeon, who, being fortunately at home, was quickly in attendance.

“ The ball had passed quite through Seaton’s left side, without injuring any vital part ; but the surgeon would not permit him to be removed from the room, where a bed was immediately prepared. For several days poor Seaton hovered between life and death ; but Mrs. Dallas, to whom he had ever been as a son, watched over and tended him with a mother’s anxiety and a mother’s care. He gradually recovered, and at the end of a twelvemonth was rewarded by the hand of her he had loved so devotedly.

“ For three years they lived happily together, when poor Seaton paid the penalty of this rash act, his constitution being so much shattered by the shock to his frame, occasioned by the wound in his breast, that he fell into a lingering consumption, which laid him in an untimely grave. My dear cousin Florence was his only child. This, Herbert, is a con-

cise account of this unfortunate affair. I should also have mentioned that Seaton's elder brother was desperately in love with Mary Dallas, and was rejected by her, about three months before the time fixed for her marriage with Mr. Bosanquet."

"Many thanks, Sinclair, for thus confiding to me these particulars, which will render Mrs. Seaton and her daughter doubly interesting in my sight; although, from what I suspect to be the case, any attentions I might bestow on the latter would fail to interest her in my favour—In short, Sinclair, although you will not admit the truth, it is not less the truth that you intend marrying Florence Seaton yourself."

"Pooh, pooh! Herbert, you are ever too rapid in jumping at conclusions; and fancies once taken into your head are difficult of expulsion. Florence has been known to me since childhood, and from the friendship that existed between her father and myself, independent of our relationship, is it not natural I should take a lively interest in his only child?"

“Of course, my dear Sinclair, it is most reasonable you should do so, and very natural, also, that a man of your deep, warm feelings should fall in love with a beautiful girl of seventeen.”

“She was barely fifteen when I saw her last, Herbert, and one of my staid ideas and habits would scarcely fall in love with a girl not then out of the school-room.”

“Ay, ay, Sinclair; it is all very improbable, no doubt, but I shall hold my opinion still; and now that we are on flat ground again, let us resume our seats in the carriage.”

CHAPTER II.

FOREST LODGE, which now appeared in view, was an ancient structure (of what date or age it would be difficult to determine, from the various additions and alterations made from time to time in the original building, of which a very small portion remained) standing on an eminence, backed up on three sides by large woodlands, and approached on the southern side by a long carriage-drive, winding through park-like grounds. The house, as its name would denote, was not large, but it contained ample accommodation for a moderately-sized family; having a good en-

trance-hall of fair proportions, small library, with good drawing and dining-rooms on the ground-floor, and six best bed-rooms, besides several minor sleeping-apartments for servants above. About three hundred and fifty acres of land appertained to the house, which had been settled by her husband on Mrs. Seaton for her life, descending to Florence after her mother's decease. There was a large lawn on the southern side of the house, tastefully laid out with shrubs and flower-beds; and a small conservatory had been erected by Mrs. Seaton, containing a choice collection of plants, in which Florence took a lively interest.

The establishment consisted of an old soldier, named Donald Macrae, who had been Mr. Seaton's servant when he first entered the army, and who now officiated as butler, head-gardener, and coachman, with a lad under him to attend to the two ponies and carriage, and the usual complement of female domestics.

Mrs. Seaton, although arrived at that period of life when ladies will not confess their age, was still very handsome, retaining the figure

and form of her youthful days; indeed so little had she been affected by time's withering hand, that, when seen together by strangers, the mother and daughter were often taken for sisters, being exactly of the same height, and in form and features closely resembling each other. Florence had now just passed her seventeenth year. She was tall, elegant, and slightly formed, as to figure, with the grace and agility of a sylph; sweet-tempered and affectionate in disposition, with dark lustrous eyes, sparkling with cheerfulness and vivacity; her features classically regular and beauteous, with rather a brunette complexion.

Florence, being a girl of quick understanding, and possessing an intellectual mind, had now completed her education; and having been permitted by her mother to travel with her aunt the last two years on the continent, she had become a superior linguist, excelling in music and all those other accomplishments which are deemed indispensable in a young lady's education. But, above all, her mind had been imbued at a very early

age with sound religious principles, which imparted to her a steadiness of character very unusual in girls of her years.

At the sound of the carriage wheels, Florence (who had been walking to and fro on the lawn, in joyful expectation of her cousin's arrival) rushed into the drawing-room, her eyes sparkling with delight, her features enlivened with extraordinary brilliance of look and colour, exclaiming, "Oh! mamma, dear Henry is coming at last—I am so happy—I could almost cry for joy."

"My dear Florence," replied Mrs. Seaton, "you must moderate this excitement—remember you are no longer a child, and your cousin is accompanied by Colonel Herbert, whom you have never seen before."

"But, mamma, he is Henry's dearest friend, of whom he has so often told me, and I am sure I shall like him."

"Perhaps so, my love; but now run to your room and take off your bonnet."

Sinclair and Colonel Herbert were most cordially received by Mrs. Seaton, and in a few minutes Florence entered the drawing-

room, with some constraint in her manner, occasioned by her mother's remarks, which did not escape her cousin's notice.

"Ah! Florence," he exclaimed, springing forward to meet her, "you are a woman now, I see, and I must forego my usual welcome," taking her hand in his own, and pressing it to his lips—"you are indeed changed, dear girl."

"Never to you, Henry," she murmured, "but—"

"Oh! I forget—let me introduce my old friend, Colonel Herbert"—who accordingly came forward to be presented.

After half an hour spent in mutual enquiries about old friends and acquaintances, Mrs. Seaton ringing the bell, said, "I suppose, Henry, you would like to see your rooms, to which your old friend Donald will conduct you, as dinner has been delayed until your arrival, Florence and myself having made a substantial luncheon."

On showing Sinclair to his room, old Donald, who was a great favourite and privileged person, lingered in making preparations for his

toilet. “ Well, Donald,” exclaimed Sinclair, “ I need not ask how it fares with you, seeing you look so hale and hearty ; and your mistress is as beautiful as ever, and seems not a day older than when I saw her last.”

“ But Miss Florence—ah, Master Henry, isn’t she an angel ?”

“ Well, Donald, I must confess she is wonderfully improved.”

“ Improved, Master Henry ! aweel ye maun say that ; but it’s muckle mair than improved, the darling chiel—and all the neighbours is wild about her beauty. Ye’ve just steppet it in time, Master Henry, or the young proud laird up yonder will be for carrying her off to Maesmuir Castle.”

“ Is he often here then, Donald ?”

“ Much more often than I like, Master Henry ; and her grand leddyship, with her twa haughty young leddies, called at the lodge na later than yester noon.”

“ Indeed, Donald ; but there is nothing very particular in all this, and only what one might expect.”

“ Aweel, sir,” replied Donald, with a sigh.

“I ken the sort of them, and dinna wish to see Miss Florence become the mistress of Maesmuir Park, if your Honor does”—with which the old man quietly left the room.

When dinner was announced, a dish of fine trout appeared on the table, much to the surprise of Mrs. Seaton, who could not forbear asking, “Why, Donald, who has made us a present of those beautiful fish ?”

“They cam frae the burn, my Leddy,” replied Donald in a matter-of-course tone, so as to prevent further enquiries.

Now the fact was, that although a small stream did rise and run through a part of the Forest Lodge Estate, yet the trout therein did not exceed in size or weight a moderate gudgeon ; but Donald had formed an alliance offensive and defensive with a certain countryman of his own, named Macpherson, bailiff and gamekeeper to the young Laird, as he was commonly called by the lower order of people in the neighbourhood, Hugh Fitzwarine (of whom more anon), whose lands joined those belonging to Mrs. Seaton ; and Donald, being a favourite with this young

gentleman, obtained game and fish at all times, when in season, for his mistress's table, for the mere asking a day or two previously, when company was expected.

Whilst the small dinner party at Forest Lodge are discussing the merits of his trout, it may be as well for us to discuss the merits and antecedents of the donor. Hugh Fitzwarine was descended from an old and once powerful family of Norman origin. His grandfather, Baron Fitzwarine, had so impoverished himself by warmly espousing the cause of the Pretender, that little else remained to his son save the bare title, which Hugh's father, considering it inconsistent with his reduced estate, on marrying and taking up his residence at Stanmore Abbey—his wife's property consisting of about two thousand acres of land—very wisely dropped, although enjoining his son, before his death, to resume it again should prosperity attend him in after life. At the time this tale commences, Hugh had attained his twenty-first year, and having finished his education at one of the Universities, had returned home. He

was the only child of his mother, and she was a widow, his father having died some years previously ; and Mrs. Fitzwarine being in very delicate health, her son was brought up to no profession, as she could not bear the idea of his leaving home. As a means of occupation, if not emolument, Hugh had however prevailed on his mother (the estate being settled on herself for life) to let him take in hand about two hundred acres of excellent land lying round the house. To assist him in its management, he had engaged a Scotch bailiff named Macpherson. In stature Hugh exceeded the medium height of man, and although rather slightly formed in limb, he possessed a powerful bodily frame. His features were expressive of frankness and good humour, although not perhaps regularly handsome ; his hair was dark and curly, and the flashing of his dark eyes the index of a temper naturally quick and haughty ; ready on the impulse of the moment to resent the slightest insult, but as ready to forgive when the excitement had passed away.

To those whom fortune had placed above

him, in a sphere from which he felt he had been unjustly debarred, he was proud and distant ; to his dependents and the poor, kind, affable, and condescending ; and to his mother dutiful and affectionate.

Hitherto, Hugh had passed little of his time at home, except during the vacations ; and from his mother living very retired, he knew little of the neighbouring families, save the clergyman of the parish, Mr. Middleton, and an old bachelor named Newman, who occupied a pretty cottage just outside the village of Stanmore, called the Bower ; and, strange as it may appear, Hugh had never yet obtained an introduction to Mrs. Seaton and her daughter, to whom he had been represented as a spoilt, wild, wayward boy, partaking of the character, if not the blood, of a North American Indian.

It may not be out of order to notice some of the principal families of the immediate neighbourhood, although few and far between ; and first, as holding the highest position in rank and wealth, stood Lord Lessingham, of Maesmuir Castle, whose father, Judge Medwyn, had amassed a large fortune

by his profession as a barrister, and finally, as Lord Chancellor, had obtained his seat in the House of Peers. His son, the present possessor of the property, a tall, thin man, known in political circles as a staunch supporter of the Whig party, appeared to be so wholly engrossed in politics as to consider all other matters of very little importance ; in fact, ambition was the idol he worshipped, and, by serving the present government, his object was to obtain another step in the Peerage.

Although haughty to his inferiors, Lord Lessingham could assume the most courteous, deferential manner towards those whom it was his interest to please or cajole ; and as the world judges chiefly by appearances, he passed as a man of great urbanity and amiable disposition. He had now attained his fifty-fifth year, and having married early in life, had four children still living, two daughters and two sons, the youngest holding office as under-secretary in the Foreign Office. The eldest and hopeful heir, from being petted and spoiled, when a child, by his lady mamma (who, notwithstanding appearances, ruled everything

and everyone at the Park, her liege lord not excepted, save in political matters, in which he was permitted to indulge without interruption), from being a pickle when a boy, had advanced to a confirmed *roué* long before attaining his majority ; and having entered the Life Guards, after two years' probation left the regiment, according to his own account, in disgust, because there were not two fellows worth speaking to at mess ; but, according to the other version of the story, a hint had been given him from the Colonel, that his presence at Kensington Barracks might be dispensed with.

The Honourable George Medwyn was now in his thirtieth year, tall and well-proportioned, with a large oval face, wide mouth, coarse features, shaggy eyebrows, and black hair. What with being well thrashed at Eton, when a bullying, lubberly lout, on two occasions, by boys of half his weight in flesh, but double his strength in spirit, and afterwards by being rather sharply drilled in his regiment, he had been licked into something like good manners, although still at heart a thorough *mauvais sujet*. Since leaving the army his chief occu-

pation lay in book-making on races, which showed long odds on the debtor's side ; and being also much addicted to cards, wine, and women, he had been constrained to deal rather largely in Post-obit bonds, which were fifty times worse than Peruvians.

Notwithstanding all these little eccentricities of character, the Honourable George Medwyn passed current as a high-spirited, dashing man about town, to which latter title he could fairly lay claim, and he had the brazen assurance to consider himself quite a lady's man. His two fashionable sisters, now in their second and third London season, had certainly bestowed considerable pains on the Honourable George to render him presentable at Almacks and other aristocratic assemblies ; but his natural tastes being decidedly plebeian, he made little advancement in polished society. It may be concluded, under such circumstances, that the noble Lord was in anything but good humour, or on very good terms with his hopeful son, who lived generally in London, and seldom put in an appearance at Maesmuir Park ; but as it is said, when things

come to the worst, they are sure to mend, so, by the same rule, this scapegrace finding town becoming rather too hot to hold him much longer, and seeing no further prospect of raising the wind to keep off the gnats and other troublesome vermin which were now continually buzzing about his ears, he addressed a very penitential letter to his much-neglected papa, do. confidential to his still doting mamma, and was received as the repentant prodigal at Maesmuir, to which, on a sudden dissolution of parliament (occasioned by the ministry being defeated in a measure of some importance), the noble Lord had repaired to rally his country party in opposition to a Tory candidate who intended to contest the county at the coming election. His son's penitential letter also gave him hopes of being able to squeeze him into the Borough of Heddington, which had heretofore returned two oppositionists to the Whig party.

Next in order to Lord Lessingham, as a man of great consequence in those parts, came Mr. Croly Chaffman, the lawyer, nicknamed, though truly named, by the lower

orders “*oily* Gammon,” from his extreme obsequiousness and loquacity. He was a man about thirty-five—stout, good-looking, very gentlemanly in manners, agreeable, and entertaining—doing an immense business, both in the country and in the town of Heddington, where he kept up a large establishment of *quill-drivers*.

He had now for some years occupied a country seat, four miles distant from the work-shop, called Ashton Hall, once belonging to an old country squire, but now said to have become his own property (from non-payment of long arrears of mortgage interest, charged at the highest rate), where he maintained an expensive establishment of servants, carriages, and horses, doing everything in the most approved style, a maiden sister presiding over the domestic arrangements ; and Mr. Chaffman, having lost his first wife, without any family, was considered a great speculation.

Chaffman knew everybody, and was known to everybody, rich and poor, within a radius of twenty miles, by being concerned in everybody’s business ; and he was considered a

man of such integrity, that little farmers, servants, and the poorer classes deemed it a favour to place their hard-earned savings in his hands, for which they received higher interest than could be obtained elsewhere.

Within two miles of the lawyer's country residence, at Prospect Place, a spacious villa erected by himself, lived Mr. Franklyn, a wealthy banker, with one son, assisting in his father's business.

In the course of this narrative—for such it is, not mere fiction—I shall have occasion to introduce to my readers other individuals living at a greater distance from my scene of operations ; but there is one other character deserving more than a passing notice at this early stage of my work, calling himself Macgregor, of whom no one knew anything, save that he lived like a hermit, in a low, strange-looking dwelling built upon his own plan, about two years before this tale commences, in a lonely dell surrounded by heath-covered hills, some five miles distant from Stanmore Abbey, but far from any other human habitation.

This being—of strange appearance, and stranger habits—was a man of lofty stature, with large bony limbs, wild-looking countenance, and a profusion of long white hair hanging loosely round his shoulders. His age it would be difficult to determine, seeing that he still walked with a firm, elastic step, and few furrows had been drawn on his forehead or cheeks by the hand of time. His habitation (constructed after the fashion of a bungalow) contained two sitting-rooms and two bed-rooms, all on the ground floor, with large French windows of plate glass ; and the only inmates besides himself were an Indian boy, of interesting countenance, and a large black cat. In the largest sitting-room lay, scattered about, costly furniture of every kind —many articles of Indian manufacture, and books in all languages—without order or arrangement ; the other room served for parlour, kitchen, and domestic purposes.

During the summer months his time was occupied in gardening ; but when winter set in, he was not seen for weeks together to emerge from his dwelling. Efforts had been

made by the clergyman of the parish to draw him from his reserve, but without avail—he would hold intercourse or exchange words with none—and he appeared to regard every other human being, save his Indian servant, with suspicion and dislike. His chief food consisted of rice, poultry raised by his own hands, vegetables and dried fruits, and water was his only beverage.

CHAPTER III.

IN John Newman (the old bachelor at the Bower) Hugh Fitzwarine had apparently found a frank, kind-hearted companion, with whom a great portion of his spare time was spent, in shooting and fishing excursions, during the sporting season. The Bower was a perfect *bijou* of its class, and its occupier, now over fifty, had resided there about five years. On first settling down among them, Newman knew not an individual, neither was his name known to one of the good people of Stanmore, where he suddenly alighted as a stray pigeon on a dove-cote. He was pecked at by the whole community—all the

gossips, headed by a little old spinster named Pringle, were by turns pecking and pulling his feathers. Being a crafty old bird, he did not attempt to peck in return, but kept his distance, employing his time in laying out the garden, and improving the Bower, which, having been unoccupied for some time, he had taken at a low rent.

Within two years his garden surpassed all others in the village for the beauty and variety of its flowers, even the worthy Vicar's, who had previously carried off several prizes at the horticultural show at Heddington. The third season he was beaten by Newman, who possessed the secret of imparting the most dazzling colours to his flowers, as well as that of forcing them to a great size. The ladies of the neighbourhood, who went to visit his garden, were in raptures, and even Lady Lessingham wished an introduction to the owner of these splendid specimens to which prizes were awarded.

He was presented by Mr. Middleton, and for the honour conferred, begged her ladyship's acceptance of the prize basket.

In return for his civility, an invitation soon followed to dine at the Castle. His point had been gained ; he was no longer a neglected man ; he began to carry his head high, and shake it too, with a vulgar air of defiance, at those who had previously passed him by. Still, Newman felt very uncomfortable at the idea of dining at the Castle ; he had never mixed in really good society during any period of his life. His acquaintances were of the second grade, one step above the common ; but it was intended by his father to push him on in the world, like so many others forced from the lower ranks into positions for which they are wholly unfitted.

All the parish soon knew of Newman's invitation to dine at the Castle ; he boasted of it to everyone who passed his door, or whom he met in the village street, although he looked forward to that dinner as one does to a painful operation—he heartily wished it over.

The hour arrived, Newman was ushered into the drawing-room of the Castle, just five minutes before the dinner hour (he had been told it was unfashionable to arrive earlier).

There was a large party already assembled—Lady Lessingham thought he would pass less observed in a crowd. The footman, remarking his trepidation, augmented it by announcing his name in a loud tone. All eyes were turned full upon him; some very pretty eyes, too, adding to his confusion, he felt ready to faint. He stopped for a moment near the door, and made a low bow.

“What a Goth!” whispered Miss Medwyn, to her cousin Lady Edith Hamilton.

Newman advanced towards Lord Lessingham, who had just moved away to evade him. Newman followed with “How di do, my Lord, hope your Lordship is quite well.”

Lord Lessingham turned sharply round. The voice was strange to him—so was the person of the speaker. Newman tendered his paw—it was more like a bear’s paw than a man’s hand. Lord Lessingham made him a formal bow, with a look expressive of “how did *you* come here?”

Lady Lessingham, who had invited him unknown to her Lord, now came forward to explain matters and introduce him. Newman

felt relieved, and began talking to her Ladyship on horticulture ; hoped her Ladyship was pleased with the last basket of dahlias, the roots of which he should reserve for her Ladyship.

Lady Lessingham expressed her thanks, saying they were the most perfect she had ever seen. At this moment dinner was announced. Lady Lessingham left him to attend to her other guests. Newman stood alone—he did not know what to do with himself or his hands, which he was desirous of hiding somewhere. One paw was thrust into his coat-tail pocket, but the other seemed always in the way—he dared not force it into his waistcoat, which was uncomfortably tight already—it would burst the buttons, and it looked vulgar to place it, as farmers generally do theirs, in a lower garment. At last he stuck the arm belonging to this unhappy paw akimbo, and in this position he looked something fearful to approach, every lady shrinking away from him with horror, fearing she might be consigned to him by Lady Lessingham.

The company were filing quickly off. There

were more gentlemen than ladies. Newman had to follow alone, with sad and solemn look and gait, like a culprit proceeding to the place of execution. On entering the dining-room, his eyes were dazzled like an owl's by a sunbeam, when they rested on the glittering plate on the table and sideboard ; such a display he had never before witnessed. He stopped to gaze on this splendid scene. A tall footman whispered him he would find a vacant chair at the lower end of the table, near his Lordship. Newman took the hint, and dashed for it without delay. He found himself at last seated next to a pretty, mischievous-looking girl (a niece of Lady Lessingham's) on one side, and an antiquated spinster aunt on the other.

Newman thought he must make himself agreeable, so he addressed the old lady.

“Very warm this evening, Mum.”

There was no reply, not even an inclination of the head.

Newman, thinking her deaf in that ear, repeated his observation in a louder note, audible to half the table.

“Don’t you think it very warm to night, Mum?”

“No, sir, I do not,” was the stiff reply, as the spinster aunt, with a shudder, drew her scarf closer round her neck, turning almost round in her chair, to avoid further conversation.

It was a cold, stormy evening in September; every body felt chilly but Newman, the temperature of whose body was at fever heat; his face looked as if he had been sitting close to the kitchen fire, and his large ears as if well boxed by the strapping scullion girl.

A servant whispered behind him—“Soup, sir?”

Newman turned his head so sharply round, that he knocked the plate out of the man’s hand, some of the contents falling over the old lady’s dress, who, looking unutterables, shifted her chair further from his side. Newman, in a fright, begged pardon for his awkwardness.

“Hope your dress isn’t much damaged, Mum.”

The aunt felt too angry to reply.

Another plate of soup was placed before him, into which he dived, to hide his confusion. At the first spoonful, a large one, his mouth felt on fire ; it was peppery and scalding hot. Newman bolted it ; it seemed like liquid lead passing down his throat. The tears stood in his eyes, still he felt impelled to proceed. The next spoonful was treated more cautiously, being well blown upon before it was raised to his lips.

He heard a suppressed titter from beneath a cambric handkerchief on his left ; he knew the pretty, mischievous owner was laughing at him ; his agitation became excessive, perceptible to all. All were watching him—he felt they were, if they were not ; it was just the same to him. He threw down the spoon in despair, and began eating his bread. His plate was quickly removed.

“ Fish, sir ? ” asked another powdered lackey.

“ Yes, sir,” replied Newman, not venturing to turn his head. Another movement of the cambric handkerchief to the face of his pretty neighbour.

“Sherry or hock?” sounded in his ear at this moment.

“Hock, sir,” said Newman, thinking it the most cooling wine of the two.

Another titter on his left. The hock went down at a draught; it refreshed him a little. He set to work at his fish, tearing it about on his plate, with his fork and piece of bread. He fancied everybody was still looking at him, which pained him the more—he thought, too, they were waiting for him. A bone stuck in his throat, from eating so hastily; it nearly choked him. In desperation he seized upon his neighbour’s bread, swallowing in haste a large piece, which took with it the fish bone. He wished himself back in the Bower, anywhere, in the old Abbey Moat—anywhere but where he was.

It was too late; he must sit it out, although he felt in purgatory, and dared not lift his eyes from his plate. He drank of every wine offered, and tasted every dish brought round; he thought himself bound to do so, without venturing to observe what others did. The company seemed inclined

to sit and talk till midnight, they were all so happy—laughing, chatting, telling amusing stories, like a small family party. The quantity of wine he had drunk began to take effect. Newman was exhilarated ; he longed to talk to somebody, anybody, he didn't care to whom ; but there was no one to talk to, everybody's tongue appearing to be fully employed. The young lady on his left, with George Medwyn ; the aunt on his right, with somebody lower down.

At last the dessert was placed on the table. Newman breathed more freely. The rattle of knives and forks was over—he felt thankful. Wine was again handed round ; Newman took port. He seized upon a peach, and politely offered it to his pretty neighbour. She received it with a smile. He became elated at his success, but his awkward paw upset her glass into her lap.

“Oh ! dear, dear,” he exclaimed, sopping it up with his napkin ; “I beg a thousand pardons, but I'll give you a new dress.”

“Oh, never mind,” she replied, laughing, with great good-humour, at his clumsy efforts

to repair the mischief he had caused ; “ pray do not trouble yourself any more.”

Newman could have worshipped her for taking things so quietly ; but her dinner partner looked ready to eat him up, muttering something about a lubber which made him feel uncomfortable—he was, perhaps, an admirer of the young lady, and might call him out.

The ladies at last rose, so did Newman, in hot haste to get rid of them (he had a great dread of ladies’ society), and nearly fell backwards over his own chair (the leg of which somehow or other would get between his legs) and Miss St. Clair also.

The mischievous girl laughed again ; Newman blushed orange colour, apologized, and said he should not forget the new dress. The young lady curtsied low and withdrew. Newman thought her an angel ; she was a kind-hearted and light-hearted girl, fond of fun and frolic ; yet such generally make good wives.

Newman felt now more at ease. He got near the Vicar, with whom he began talking

on flowers and fruits, his favourite themes. There were some splendid grapes on the table, which had taken his fancy ; he had never seen finer. The peaches and nectarines were also magnificent, so were the filberts. Newman liked filberts particularly ; he cracked away at the nuts, whilst other men were cracking jokes, some at his expense, but he did not take them. He began to feel more at home, and never passed the bottle without filling his glass to the brim. Bacchus opened his heart ; in fact, Newman was already half-seas over, from drinking so much at dinner, and eating so little.

Politics were introduced ; Newman was a Whig, he knew his host to be one ; he would kick out Jones at the next election ; he could command a dozen votes for the county.

Lord Lessingham opened his eyes very wide.

Newman advocated reform, church reform, every reform, abolition of church rates.

Mr. Middleton looked aghast. Newman went on in this strain until coffee went into the dining-room. He would not take coffee

until the duty was taken off—nor tea either, he would stick to the claret—and so he did, till an adjournment was made to the drawing-room.

How he reached it Newman did not know; or how he found himself sitting with Miss St. Clair on the sofa, he could not tell; but there he was, and positively making love to her—calling her an angel, a divinity, and I don't know what.

Miss St. Clair was amused. She begged him, however, not to talk such nonsense. Newman said he could talk nothing else—yes, he could—he could tell her a story. She would like to hear his story very much.

Now Newman *could* tell a story in his own fashion; it was the only thing he could do well. He was also a very good mimic. He began his story in a low key at first, as for Miss St. Clair's ear alone; it was a ludicrous one, she was amused, and laughed. Newman became more excited in voice and manner as he warmed with his subject. Other listeners drew near. Newman forgot where he was, or by whom surrounded. He saw Miss St. Clair

only, delighted as he proceeded. He cared for nobody else in the room. His spirit was fairly roused. He rose from the sofa, gesticulating before her, and mimicking the voice and manner of the hero of his story. His face and acting reminded one of Liston. The piano was deserted—every voice was hushed but his—all gathered round him—even Lord Lessingham ceased talking politics.

“Who is he?” asked one.

“He beats Liston,” remarked another.

“As good as a farce,” said a third.

Newman heard no one, and saw no one but Miss St. Clair, who was in fits of laughter, enjoying the fun. Newman ceased speaking; his tale was told.

“Thank you,” said Miss St. Clair, “your story was very amusing.”

“Shall I tell you another,” asked Newman, “of an old gouty man in love?”

“Oh, pray do,” she replied.

Newman commenced *de novo*. His mimicry of the old gentleman was complete; his contortions of feature, from twinges of gout in his toe and spasms of love at the heart, were

imitable—his alternate sighings and swearings a masterpiece of acting. But when Newman began cautiously to descend on his knees, lowering himself gradually and painfully before Miss St. Clair, making the most grotesque grimaces, the whole company were convulsed with merriment.

The scene became highly interesting. His vows and protestations of love, with an occasional aside anathema against his gouty toe, were truly entertaining. But when he seized her hand in his great paw, declaring he would never rise until she sealed the compact with a kiss, the hitherto joyous girl became frightened by his earnestness of manner and look, and springing suddenly up, overturned Newman on his back, in her effort to disengage her hand from his grasp, and fled from the room.

Newman lay sprawling on the carpet, grinning horribly for a few seconds, shrieks of laughter from the ladies ringing around him.

“Come, old fellow, give me your hand,” cried Medwyn; “I’ll help you up, and we are much obliged by your entertainment.”

Newman was no longer avoided, but complimented by many, even by Lady Lessingham, on his humour and wit. He would help to enliven a dull winter evening—he was to be patronized.

CHAPTER IV.

WE must now return to Forest Lodge. The presence of Colonel Herbert, coupled with her mother's caution, acted as a check on Florence Seaton during the dinner hour; but the suppression of those feelings of pleasure at her cousin's return imparted a degree of embarrassment to her manner, when addressing him, which was not unobserved by his friend, and led him to form the most natural conclusion, that Sinclair's well-known partiality for his cousin was fully reciprocated. Neither in this conjecture had the Colonel's knowledge of womankind very far erred; for Flo-

rence did highly esteem and love her cousin—more than any other human being, save her own mother.

After the ladies had retired, Herbert could not forbear congratulating his friend on possessing the affections of the beautiful Florence, which he fruitlessly attempted to gainsay.

“It is useless, my dear fellow,” continued Colonel Herbert, “arguing against yourself, and my greater experience of female character; you are far too diffident of your own mental and personal qualifications, so peculiarly calculated to win the affections of any sensible woman; and, without pretending to be gifted with any extraordinary penetration, I am fully satisfied, even from this short observation, of that young girl’s sentiments towards yourself; and I’ll bet you five pounds, that within six months of this time you will either be engaged or married to her.”

“Oh! no, no,” exclaimed Sinclair, with a deep, deep sigh, “that can never be.”

“And why not, my over-modest friend?”

“There are reasons—strong and powerful reasons—why it cannot be. Her father’s oldest,

dearest friend must not act unfairly—dishonourably I might say—towards his only child. No, no, Herbert, there is treason in the very thought!"

"But worse than treason in the thought of lightly treating the love of that sweet girl, whose young hopes and dreams of happiness, if I am not mistaken, seem centred in yourself."

"Well, well, Herbert, let us say no more on this subject; and I beg you will never express your very hasty opinions to a third person."

"Of my secrecy you may rest assured, my dear fellow; but pray take my advice in not sacrificing her happiness and your own to such morbid, absurd ideas as those you at present entertain; so now, with your permission, we will finish our bottle of claret, and join the ladies."

The next day, Colonel Herbert resumed his journey *en route* to his own relations, who lived some thirty miles distant. Florence rejoiced secretly at his departure, for she had several times detected his eye fixed with a

searching, inquisitive look upon her, when conversing with her cousin, which made her feel uncomfortable in his presence ; she would now have him to herself in their walks, rides, and drives together, as Mrs. Seaton seldom used the pony-carriage, and two old friends of her mother's, Admiral and Mrs. Bowen, were expected the next day on a visit, or rather visitation, as they generally spent a month or two at Forest Lodge every summer.

A fortnight had passed most agreeably to Sinclair, although, from the intense heat of the weather, the rambles of the two cousins had been almost restricted to the grounds immediately surrounding the house, and, except on two or three occasions, to return visits, the pony-carriage had not been put in requisition ; when, after a heavy thunder-storm the previous night, which cooled the air, Florence suggested a ride over the hills to see the ruins of Stanmore Abbey, only part of it being habitable for the family.

“ But what will Mrs. Fitzwarine and her son think of our visiting their place without calling upon themselves ? ”

“ Oh, nothing at all, Henry,” replied Florence ; “ Mrs., or Lady Fitzwarine, as she is called by the humbler classes, never visits any-one ; in fact, she neither keeps a carriage nor horses for her own use, but every facility is afforded to strangers and visitors wishing to see the ruins and the grounds surrounding them, by the old gardener living in the lodge.”

“ Well, Florence, but what of the son, whom report invests with such a fierce, haughty spirit ? Have you ever seen this strange speci-men of the human race, who is said to inherit all the pride without the manners of his Nor-man ancestry ?”

“ We have never met, Henry ; therefore of his appearance or manners I can speak only from the reports of others, who represent him as a handsome young man, but greatly defi-cient in all other respects ; in short, he leads a wild, solitary life, chiefly occupied with field sports and farming ; but not a word must be spoken to his disparagement to old Donald, with whom he is an especial favourite.”

“ Then to Donald, I conclude, must I look for an introduction to this Orson of the woods,

as I should like much to make his acquaintance ; strange, eccentric characters, as you know, always excite my curiosity. Poor fellow ! he is very young still, his education has perhaps been neglected, and that (you know sufficient of Latin to understand the quotation) *Emollit mores nec sinit esse feros.*"

" Yes, Henry, by your kind instruction, I comprehend your meaning, and also the motive which urges you to seek an introduction to Mr. Fitzwarine."

" And what may that be, my fair cousin ?"

" Benevolence, and your kind, charitable disposition, Henry, which is ever prompting you to generous actions."

" Let us to horse then, Florence, and be doing instead of talking."

On arriving at the lodge-gate of Stanmore Abbey, the cousins dismounted, and, escorted by the old gardener, first took a survey of the pleasure grounds, and then, preceded by their guide, began to ascend some rude stone steps leading to the walls, on which, from their breadth, a walk had been constructed sufficiently wide to admit of two persons ; and at

certain intervals, where the stones had given way, small wooden bridges had been raised, which, from the effects of time, wind, and weather, now afforded a very insecure passage. Some thirty feet below, lay the dark, deep moat, with its sullen waters, over which a ripple never played, or a sunbeam shed its cheering rays. Sinclair's courage failed him on treading these treacherous planks, which trembled and cracked beneath his feet ; but his fear was for another, dearer to him than his own life, for which, in comparison with hers, he cared little ; and seeing the hazardous nature of their path, he begged Florence to return immediately, or they would in all probability be dashed into the moat below. "Indeed, my dear girl," he remonstrated, "these planks are so decayed that they will scarcely support my weight ; and should one fail, we might be drowned, or dashed to pieces against those rude jutting stones before we reached the water."

"I will return directly," she replied, "when I have gathered that beautiful little creeper ;" and extending her foot for the purpose, the

loose stone on which it was placed gave way, and with a shriek which scared the very owls and bats from their hiding-places in the old ivy-clad walls, she was precipitated into the yawning abyss below. With the instinctive love of life, she grasped in her descent a stunted ash growing from the wall, to which she clung for a moment with fearful tenacity ; her hold then gradually relaxed with departing consciousness—a splash was heard—and the dark waters, opening to receive her senseless form, again closed over her, presenting the same unbroken surface as before. Sinclair stood for a second speechless, motionless, horrified at the sight—his limbs and senses paralyzed—when another form was seen to cleave the air, headlong into that watery grave in which poor Florence seemed buried. Roused from his stupor, Sinclair was about casting himself down to rescue his cousin, when the old guide seized him by the arm, exclaiming, “Heaven be praised, sir ! Mr. Hugh has saved the lady.”

“Then quick, old man, out of my way ;” and Sinclair flew, rather than ran, over the

path he had before trodden with so much caution, until he reached the stone steps, down which he hastened with two bounds that brought him headlong to the bottom ; but instantly recovering his feet, he rushed wildy, madly, to the side of the moat where his cousin had disappeared ; but no human form met his vision.

“ Gracious powers !” exclaimed Sinclair, in accents of despair, “ they are both drowned ;” and tearing his coat off, he was about to spring into the moat, when the old gardener, who had followed quickly at his heels, seizing him by the arm, cried out, “ Gude save us, but the mon’s demented ! Look here, your honour, they’re no longer there ; see, my young laird’s footsteps are on the bank.”

“ Then, where in the name of wonder can they be ?” enquired Sinclair, looking vacantly around him.

“ Safe in my leddy’s chamber, I’ll warrant, sir. Where else would Mr. Hugh take her to ?”

“ Then lead the way quickly to the house, old man,” was the reply.

To explain Hugh's sudden appearance, we must state that he had been sitting in one of the old windows (his favourite resort during hot weather), to angle for perch, with which the moat abounded, when, hearing the voices of strangers, he beheld Sinclair and Miss Seaton (her face being well known to him) approaching over the spot on which he now remained, concealed among the thickly clustering ivy. Knowing the treacherous state of the planks above his head, Hugh, fearing some accident, had laid aside his fishing-rod, and stood prepared for an event which so quickly happened.

Hugh Fitzwarine, on rescuing Florence, had immediately carried her in his arms to the Abbey ; and, entering by the back way, called lustily for the women servants, who, rushing to his aid, assisted him in carrying her apparently lifeless form to his mother's bed-room ; where, being laid on a sofa, she was left to the care of his old nurse, who placed her immediately on the bed, using hot flannels and other means to restore suspended animation. Mrs. Fitzwarine was also quickly

at her side, with sal volatile, brandy, and other stimulants, by the use of which Florence began slowly to revive. Sinclair, meanwhile, had been shown into the drawing-room by the man-servant, of whom he asked twenty questions in a breath, receiving only one reply, that the young lady had been laid in his mistress's own bed, and was recovering consciousness.

“Will you send this card to Mrs. Fitzwarine, then?” asked Sinclair; “and say, Major Sinclair wishes to see her, if only for one moment.”

“My lady will be down as soon as possible,” said the servant, on re-entering the room; “and begs you will not be alarmed about Miss Seaton.”

Sinclair paced the room in restless impatience, for, as he thought, at least an hour, but which did not much exceed a quarter of that time; when the door turning noiselessly on its hinges, Mrs. Fitzwarine stood before him.

“A thousand thanks, my dear madam, for your kind attentions; but pray excuse my

want of courtesy in asking so abruptly after my cousin."

"She has recovered from her swoon, Major Sinclair, but will require repose, and great care, after such a fearful fall; pray calm your excitement. I do not believe Miss Seaton has sustained any serious injury; and my son, as soon as he placed her on the sofa, without waiting to change his wet garments, rode off directly for the surgeon, whom I see just coming up to the hall door. You will, therefore, excuse my leaving you for a short time, and you shall see the doctor yourself before he leaves the house."

Twenty minutes more elapsed—an age to the impatient, perturbed mind of Sinclair—when Mr. Watson relieved him of further anxiety, by declaring Miss Seaton much better than he expected to find her, from Mr. Fitzwarine's account of the accident.

"She has, however," he said, "sustained a great shock to the nervous system, and will require complete quietude for a few days; but as she has expressed great anxiety to return home, I have administered an opiate,

and promised that her wishes in that respect shall be complied with. You will, therefore, see to this being done, and send her maid, with things necessary for her removal, this evening."

Sinclair, almost crushing the doctor's hand in his powerful grasp, with many thanks for his favourable report, rushed from the house, without waiting to see Mrs. Fitzwarine again, and galloped furiously away to Forest Lodge, where, with great caution, having related to Mrs. Seaton as much as he deemed prudent at present to disclose, his own carriage was ordered to convey her back to Stanmore Abbey.

We will draw a veil over the meeting between mother and daughter, whose grateful outbursts of thankfulness for their providential restoration to each other's arms went home to the heart of Mrs. Fitzwarine ; and the tears chased each other down her cheeks, from feelings of a kindred nature, as she silently witnessed this affecting scene. Releasing her daughter from her long embrace, she turned to thank Mrs. Fitzwarine for her kind-

ness to her child ; when, overpowered by that emotion experienced only by those of warm and loving hearts, their arms were suddenly extended, and the mothers fell sobbing on each other's breast. Notwithstanding, however, Mrs. Fitzwarine's pressing invitation to remain at the Abbey that night, Florence's earnest wish to return home was complied with the same evening ; and on descending to the drawing-room, Sinclair caught her in his arms, exclaiming fervently—"Thank God ! my dear, dear Florence, you have been saved from a dreadful death, although not by my hand."

"By whose hand then, dear Henry, have I been rescued from a watery grave?"

"To Mrs. Fitzwarine's brave son are you indebted for your life, who sprang instantly to your assistance before I could recover from the stupor which your sudden fall occasioned."

Mrs. Seaton expressing great desire to thank in person the preserver of her daughter's life, a servant was sent in search of him ; who returned in a few minutes, saying his young master had gone out on horseback, leaving

word that he should not probably return till late in the evening.

Mrs. Seaton seemed hurt at this message; but the carriage being at the door, she shook hands cordially with Mrs. Fitzwarine, and Florence, after receiving from her a warm embrace, was quickly conveyed home to Forest Lodge.

CHAPTER V.

By the doctor's directions, Florence was immediately placed in bed, and medicines administered to counteract the effects he anticipated might ensue ; so that in a few days she was enabled, although pale and subdued by the fearful peril she had incurred, to make her appearance in the drawing-room. There was, however, an unpleasant feeling sometimes crossing her mind when she thought of another rushing without hesitation to her deliverance, whilst her cousin stood looking on. A stranger had plunged headlong into the dark waters, raised and carried her to a place

of safety, ere her cousin had reached the moat in which she had been engulfed; and when the name of Hugh Fitzwarine was mentioned, a strange sensation crept through her heart, which sent the blood thrilling to her cheeks.

How suddenly had an event occurred, most extraordinary, most unexpected, which in a few brief, agitating moments had entirely changed the relations which had previously existed between Hugh Fitzwarine and Florence Seaton! She was now indebted to a man she had never known—never seen—for the greatest obligation one human being can owe another—a favour she could never forget or repay. Gratitude to that being who had saved her from a watery grave seemed to the warm heart of Florence almost a cold feeling. A deep sense of her past danger—the rapture of recovered life, and thankfulness for the merciful preservation of it, through the agency of Hugh Fitzwarine—the thought of her mother's agony had she been drowned—these caused powerful, exciting emotions in the young, fervent mind of Florence Seaton.

Sinclair felt vexed and annoyed that Hugh

Fitzwarine had been the preserver of his cousin's life ; but, with the candour of a generous mind, rode over the next morning to express his obligations in person for the inestimable service he had rendered. But Hugh was not at home when he called, and no one could tell when he would be, not even his mother.

The third morning, Mrs. Seaton drove to the Abbey, and sat at least two hours with Mrs. Fitzwarine, in the hope of seeing her son, but in vain—Hugh was not visible. Mrs. Fitzwarine was next invited to spend a day and dine at Forest Lodge, which she declined, although in the most courteous manner, alleging that her health was in such a precarious state she never dined from home.

“Then, my dear madam,” asked Mrs. Seaton, “will you permit me to send our pony-carriage for you, if you will favour us with a visit even for an hour?”

“That I will, with pleasure, avail myself of, either to-morrow or next day, as most convenient to yourself,” was the reply.

“And may I hope your son will accompany you?” added Mrs. Seaton. “Indeed, I am

most anxious to see him, and hope he will not disappoint us in driving over with you."

"Hugh is very shy in ladies' society," replied Mrs. Fitzwarine with a smile, "and I fear I cannot answer for his appearance at Forest Lodge."

Mrs. Seaton felt disappointed at this reply, but would urge no more on this subject, and soon after took her leave. At the dinner-table, however, that evening, she again alluded to Hugh's extraordinary behaviour; on which Major Sinclair said—

"Oh! it is useless giving ourselves any further trouble on this young boor's account, who, although perhaps quite at home in the company of keepers and such persons, would probably stand abashed with open mouth, nerveless and confounded, in the presence of ladies."

"He did not stand nerveless and confounded when a young lady lay before him at the bottom of the moat, in ten foot water," remarked Admiral Bowen, with a look full of meaning at the Major; "and I admire this young fellow's innate modesty in not coming

forward to be overpowered with a vote of thanks, which, to some men's minds, is almost as disagreeable as walking the plank. But I'll warrant his heart is, like the heart of a sailor, in the right place ; and since the Major has failed to obtain speech with the lad, I'll hoist my flag to-morrow morning, and bring him alongside my old seventy-four."

During this speech, the eyes of Florence were riveted on her plate ; for she felt deeply pained by her cousin's unusual and uncharitable reflections on the manners of one who, although unknown to herself, had risked his life to save hers. But the fact was that Sinclair had been possessed by the demon of jealousy to speak disparagingly and unfairly of Hugh Fitzwarine, by observing the heightened colour on his cousin's cheeks whenever his name was mentioned.

The subject was then dropped ; but early the next morning, before breakfast, the old Admiral set sail on his cob, steering right away for Stanmore Abbey ; but, instead of going direct to the house, rode into the stable-

yard, where, meeting a lad, he asked if the young Laird were at home.

“I dinna ken,” replied the boy; “but what might your Honour want?”

“To see his setters, my lad, as I hear he has a famous sort.”

The message was delivered to Hugh, who happened to be in the stable, having just returned from an early ride; and he immediately went to meet the Admiral, who, after the usual formal salutations had been exchanged, apologizing for his intrusion at so unseasonable an hour, said, having heard of Mr. Fitzwarine’s superior breed of white setters, he had taken the liberty of riding over, in the hope of being favoured with a sight of them.

“Pray may I ask,” enquired Hugh, “whom I have the honour of addressing?”

“Certainly, sir; my name is Admiral Bowen;” at the same time handing a card from his waistcoat pocket, which Hugh accepting with a courteous bow, said, “I conclude, from your wish to see my setters, you patronize the dog and gun.”

“ I have been accustomed to the smell of powder, young gentleman, since I entered as midshipman on board His Majesty’s line-of-battle-ship, the Thunderer, in the year 17— ; but as we have now no longer the Gallic race to fire at, I wage war with grouse and partridges.”

Four beautiful setters, with coats as clean and white as driven snow, being at Hugh’s command let loose from their kennel, rushed to their young master, jumping and playing round him with exuberant spirits ; the old Admiral, with his glass to his eye, scrutinizing their looks and forms with the attention of a connoisseur.

“ They are indeed splendid animals,” he remarked, after a few minutes’ observation— “ good heads and necks—fine shoulders, capital legs and feet, with plenty of bone, wide ribs, and muscular backs and loins. Splendid dogs indeed, sir, and their condition quite perfection ; standing, I suppose, sir, the two dogs about twenty-four inches in height, and the two bitches a trifle under.”

“ You are not far wide of the mark, sir, as

to their height," replied Hugh with a smile ; " and I perceive your knowledge of make and shape is tolerably correct also."

" Well, sir," asked the Admiral, " what would you take for that dog now licking your hand ?"

Hugh Fitzwarine instantly drew himself up to his full height, and regarding the Admiral with a proud and flashing eye, replied, " Nothing, sir, that Admiral Bowen can offer ; for, poor as I may be thought, no price will tempt me to part with a favourite dog or horse ;" and turning indignantly on his heel, he was leaving the yard, when the Admiral exclaimed, " Stay, Mr. Fitzwarine, one moment ; on my honour as a gentleman, I meant not to offend you."

" Then, sir," said Hugh, turning slowly round, " having indulged you with an inspection of my dogs, I must now," raising his hat from his head, " have the honour of wishing you good morning."

" No, no, my young friend," resumed the Admiral, " for as such from this hour I should be proud to call you, you would not thus part in anger with an old man, although a stranger,

who never intended giving you offence ; come, sir, excuse a sailor's bluntness, and give me your hand."

Hugh took the extended hand in his, saying, "I also owe an apology to you, Admiral Bowen, for my testiness this morning ; but as my mother is delaying breakfast on my account, I must now wish you good morning, unless I can prevail upon you to partake our morning meal, which would afford us both much pleasure."

"Although equally obliged by your kind offer of hospitality, which at some future period I hope to avail myself of, my friends will be expecting my return home ; and with many thanks for your courtesy, I must now wish you good morning."

"Stay a moment, sir," exclaimed Hugh, running into the stable, and returning with a beautiful white setter puppy, about six weeks old ; "you shall not be disappointed in your object ; for although I do not sell dogs, I can afford to present one to an old sportsman."

"A thousand thanks, my young friend, for your beautiful gift," exclaimed the old Admi-

ral, greatly delighted, “ which I shall prize the more for his owner’s sake; and now, my boy,” grasping his hand again firmly in his, “ God bless you, farewell! we shall, I trust, soon meet again.”

Carrying the puppy carefully in his left arm, the Admiral mounted his cob, and when clear of the premises, began muttering to himself, “ A boor indeed ! why, that lad, sir, is fit to be a prince. Hah ! hah ! Major—a boor indeed ! egad, my fine fellow, he’ll soon put your nose out of joint.”

Highly elated with such thoughts, the Admiral soon reached Forest Lodge, and having washed his hands, descended to the breakfast-room (where the family were still seated at table) with the puppy in his arms.

“ Why, what in the name of goodness have you there, Admiral ?” asked his wife.

“ A present from a boor,” replied he, exultingly.

“ A nasty, dirty puppy, I declare,” retorted his *cara sposa*.

“ A sweet, beautiful little thing,” said the Admiral ; “ but there, Miss Florence, you sha

decide if there is anything offensive about this little darling," placing it in her lap. "There, my dear, give him a little milk in your saucer, as you have finished your breakfast. Boor indeed ! Egad, Major, Hugh Fitzwarine would feel as much at home in St. James's Palace as traversing these moors with his dog and gun. A boor indeed ! hah ! hah ! Major, a capital joke, by my soul—ho, ho ! why, sir, the lad would walk the deck with the step and air of a full Admiral."

"And do you really mean to say," asked Mrs. Seaton, "that you have seen Mr. Fitzwarine, and that he has given you that pretty puppy?"

"Yes, my dear madam, it is perfectly true ; and you see there is nobody like an old sailor to get the windward tack on a fast-sailing runaway craft ;" and he then, whilst devouring slice after slice of cold ham and chicken, gave a full account of his meeting with Hugh ; commenting on his handsome person and gentlemanly manners, and concluding with, "A boor indeed ! by Jove, madam, he looks and speaks like a prince."

During the Admiral's relation of his interview with her preserver, Florence was very busily engaged in making the puppy drink his milk ; and only once raised her eyes, when she encountered her cousin's gaze fixedangrily, as she fancied, upon her pet, which did not escape the Admiral's notice.

" Well, my dear," he said, " as Mrs. Bowen hates babies and puppy dogs, will you be kind enough to take charge of my pet whilst I remain at Forest Lodge, and stow him away in some safe berth ?"

" Most willingly, sir," replied Florence with a smile ; " but what name is he to have ?"

" Egad, you've nearly puzzled me, my dear — let me consider — Ponto and Carlo are too common — Sailor, a capital one for a Newfoundland dog, but won't do for a setter. By Jove ! Hugh shall be his name — but stay, that won't suit ; if I call him Hugh, Hugh will call me out, for he's a deuced peppery lad, notwithstanding his good looks. Well, I have it at last — Stanmore Abbey — yes, Stanmore's a famous name — Stan for short. Ay, ay, sir — Stand for ever, I'll warrant him, with his

face to the birds, as his master would facing his enemies. There, my dear, run away with the young rogue now, and I'll christen him Stanmore with a glass of port-wine after dinner."

Florence, requiring no further hint to leave the room, quickly made her escape with her new pet. During that whole day, Sinclair was gloomy and abstracted, and scarcely spoke to Florence; but after dinner, when sitting in the drawing-room, she approached him saying—

"Henry, how have I offended you?"

"You have not offended me, Florence," he replied very gravely; "but I have been rather annoyed by the Admiral, who appears to take pleasure in boring me with the praises of this young stranger; but I hope you will not play the part of nurse to that confounded puppy, just to please that old man's humour."

"Indeed, Henry, it is a beautiful little pet, and I have taken a great fancy to it already."

"Perhaps you will take as sudden a fancy to his late owner," he replied very testily,

which caused the blood to mount to her very temples.

“Nay, Henry,” she said, “now you are unjust, and really must be in a very cross humour.”

“Not with you, dear girl; so play me some lively air to dispel the fiend bad humour.”

“So the evil spirit which rested on Saul has departed,” remarked the Admiral on entering the room soon after, “at the playing of Florence. Well, Major, I congratulate you on regaining your complacency of temper; and now I will confess that, being nettled by your sarcastic reflections on Florence’s preserver—for whether poor, bumpkin, or boor, I must have loved him for saving that dear child’s life—I may now confess, I say, that the picture I have drawn of Hugh Fitzwarine was a trifle overcoloured; but he is a good-humoured, rather good-looking lad, although not half so handsome as a certain Major of Dragoons, shy and distant in his manner to strangers; in short, he might pass muster on parade, without being calculated to excite the Major’s spleen or jealousy.”

“ It is to me, Admiral, a matter of perfect indifference whether Mr. Fitzwarine is handsome or plain, gentlemanly or the reverse ; but as he seems to be in such high favour with yourself, perhaps you will indulge us with an introduction to your new friend.”

“ Softly, Major, I did not tell him I was staying at Forest Lodge, or I had neither got speech from him, nor that puppy ; and probably, having discovered where my vessel now lies at anchor, he won’t again come within range of my speaking trumpet. However, to gratify your curiosity, I’ll try again to-morrow.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning, the Admiral made another cruise to Stanmore Abbey ; but, after beating about in various directions, he was obliged to return without catching sight of Hugh, who, having learnt from his keeper Macpherson that the Admiral was staying at Forest Lodge, did not choose to be at home when he called ; and of course none of the domestics could tell where their young master was to be found.

But why should Hugh Fitzwarine thus carefully avoid communication with the inmates of Forest Lodge ? He knew Florence by report,

for Donald often spoke to him in raptures of his dear young mistress—so kind-hearted, so gentle, so affectionate, so beautiful. He had before seen her (although unseen by her). When lying in ambush for rabbits with his gun during the spring, in the glen through which the walks from Forest Lodge extended, his eye was arrested by the lovely vision of Florence, like a wood nymph, passing close by where he lay concealed. Often had he longed to join her in her walks, but diffidence kept him back. Why, or wherefore, it may be superfluous to explain ; but that spot became, from that evening, Hugh's favourite resting-place during many a soft summer evening, and the rabbits and hares played unharmed around him. It was here also that Hugh had now lately seen the two cousins walking together ; and the night before his rescuing Florence from the moat, words of Major Sinclair's had reached his ears, addressed to his beautiful companion, which made him fly that spot for ever.

The Admiral returned rather crest-fallen, and apparently out of humour, from his vain

pursuit after the truant, remarking to Sinclair, “I begin to lean to your opinion, Major, that this young Will-o’-the-wisp is not worth more powder and shot ;” and from that day all further interest in him seemed to cease, as if by mutual consent.

The same afternoon, the Hon. George Medwyn drove over in his dog-cart to Forest Lodge, with an invitation to Mrs. Seaton from Lady Lessingham, for an archery meeting, and dance afterwards, at Maesmuir Park, which was to take place the following week.

“ By the way, Miss Seaton,” he said, “ perhaps you have heard of my intention of standing for the Borough of Heddington at the forthcoming election ; may I hope, therefore, for your vote and interest on this momentous occasion, as ladies have great influence in these cases.”

“ I fear,” she replied, “ there is very little prospect of my being able to assist you.”

“ Oh yes, Miss Seaton, you may greatly, with your music-master, piano-tuner, book-seller, dress-maker, and haberdasher, who have interest with other persons in the town ; and I

am quite sure no one could refuse a favour asked by Miss Seaton."

"I don't think it quite the thing, sir," observed the Admiral, "for young ladies to be seen canvassing electors."

"Indeed, sir! that may be your opinion; but I beg to say that Lady Lessingham does not consider it *infra dig.* in my sisters calling on the tradesmen; and there is not an elector, I believe, living in the most obscure alley, whom they have not solicited for his vote."

"Most likely," retorted the Admiral; "some people, when they have an object to gain, are not very particular by what means it is accomplished."

"Well, Mr. Medwyn," interposed Mrs. Seaton (fearing the Admiral's ill-humour), "I will use any influence I may possess in the town to favour your views."

"Many thanks, my dear madam, for your kindness, and having enlisted the ladies on my side; I do not fear the result of the contest. By the way, Miss Seaton, we heard of your taking a cold-water bath in that frightful old moat at the Abbey, and of the young

Abbot, as we call him, plunging in to your rescue ; but really you look ten times more blooming than ever—cold water, I am told, is a wonderful specific for imparting a colour to the complexion. Perhaps, Miss Seaton, you might persuade Mr. Fitzwarine to help my governor a little in his county canvass for Lord Bramston, the Whig candidate, as none of our party can ever catch him at home.”

“ I have not the pleasure of knowing Mr. Fitzwarine,” replied Florence, with a deep blush.

“ Oh, indeed ! a very strange young fellow, I am told ; but he did not wait for an introduction when you fell into the water, and I conclude you will know him again when you meet.”

“ I fear not,” replied Florence, blushing still more, and feeling very uncomfortable ; “ for I did not recover consciousness until some time after the ‘ accident.’ ”

“ Oh, well, no great loss I think—not at all a ladies’ man, poor fellow—sad spooney, I am told.”

“Who told you, sir,” demanded the Admiral, no longer able to control his disgust, “that Mr. Fitzwarine is a spooney?”

“Eh, old gentleman, 'pon my life I can hardly say who told me; but such he is reported to be.”

“Then, sir, you have the authority of Admiral Bowen for contradicting that report. Hugh Fitzwarine is not a spooney, sir; nor half such a fool as some persons I could mention.”

“Very well, Admiral,” replied the Honourable George, rising; “I was not aware of his being your friend; but that, I am quite sure, is sufficient proof that he cannot be a spooney. And now, Mrs. Seaton, having various pressing calls to make before dinner, you will excuse me, I know, for tearing myself away from this very agreeable society;” when, shaking hands with her and Florence, he quitted the room.

“Thank God! he's gone,” cried Admiral Bowen, jumping up from his chair, ere the Honourable George had closed the door, “or I must have quarrelled with him; for of all

the impertinent, conceited coxcombs I have encountered in the whole course of my existence, that fellow is the greatest."

"He is not remarkable for good sense," Mrs. Seaton added; "but as there are so few families in the neighbourhood, it is an object with me to keep on good terms with them; so I hope, Admiral, Lady Lessingham's invitation including all my visitors at Forest Lodge, you will be of our party, as I am told half the county are expected; and it will be a good opportunity for Florence's introduction."

"Your wishes are commands to me, my dear madam," he replied with a low bow; "independent of which, I shall be delighted to witness that dear girl's first appearance in a ball-room."

We must now take a peep into the Bower that same evening, where, seated at a small round table after dinner, with a dish of magnificent strawberries, the produce of his own garden, and a bottle of light summer wine, were John Newman and Hugh Fitzwarine.

"Well, Hugh," enquired the former, "are

you going to this archery meeting next week, for which, of course, you have received an invitation, as well as myself?"

"I think not, Newman; for as it has been the first, so I hope it will be the last invitation I shall have the honour of receiving to Maesmuir Park. It may suit Lord Lessingham's views, on the eve of a general election, to ask me to his house, but it does not suit my disposition to go there. Who is Lord Lessingham, that he should presume to treat with superciliousness those who by birth are far his superiors, and in other respects his equals?"

"Come, come, Hugh, don't be supercilious yourself; we must take the world as we find it, and use it as others do—to suit their own convenience; now, I care no more for Lord Lessingham than you do—in short, I thoroughly despise the man for his time-serving, place-hunting propensities; but it suits my convenience to attend this meeting and ball, because I expect to see several friends there; and, having promised him my assistance, I intend myself the pleasure of

taking the value out in a champagne supper, which I am told he intends giving on this occasion ; I have also made up my mind to have as companion in my drag to the place of rendezvous, a certain young gentleman named Hugh Fitzwarine.”

“Indeed, Newman, you must excuse me ; I will accept no favour at the hands of Lord Lessingham.”

“Neither will I, Fitzwarine—for I am as proud and independent as yourself (which, by the way, happened to be the reverse of Newman’s character) ; but here the favour lies on your side and mine, as I understand Mrs. Fitzwarine supports his friend as well as myself.”

“Not on Lord Lessingham’s account, Newman ; my mother being distantly related to Lord Bramston, who had written to ask for her interest with our tenants.”

“A distinction, Hugh, without much difference, about which there is no necessity for our splitting straws ; but when I tell you that Miss Seaton is to make her *début* at the ball

in the evening, I am sure that is sufficient inducement for you to attend it."

"Not for me," replied Hugh, with a sigh.

"And why not, my boy?"

"Simply because Miss Seaton does not particularly interest me (here Hugh told a bit of a fib); and I believe she is already engaged to her cousin."

"A pack of stuff, Hugh; why, the Major has not been more than a fortnight yet at Forest Lodge, and unless he bespoke her when in the school-room, he would scarcely have proposed and been accepted in that short time; besides which, Mrs. Seaton has, I am convinced, too much good sense to allow her daughter to be engaged to Sinclair, before she has seen something more of the world."

"From what I have seen and heard, I think differently, Newman; and from a few words of Major Sinclair's which once reached my ear, I am satisfied he is attached, if not already engaged, to his cousin."

"Well, I don't care whether he is in love with her or not, Hugh; so may you be, and twenty other men; but the girl has a right to

choose for herself. Don't you remember what Sir Walter Raleigh wrote on a pane of glass, with his diamond ring, when a bashful youngster like yourself:—‘Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall.’ And what the Queen wrote under:—‘If thy heart fail thee, climb not then at all.’ So say I to you, if a spark of the spirit of his noble race yet lingers in the breast of Hugh Fitzwarine—unless he would be considered a degenerate cur—sneaking amongst the ruins of his fallen house, afraid to face the world—a fit companion only for bats and owls——”

“ By heavens ! sir,” exclaimed Hugh, starting from his chair, whilst fury flashed from his dark-sparkling eyes, “ I will endure such language from no man living——”

“ Except from your friend, John Newman.”

“ No, sir, not from you,” replied Hugh.

“ Then hear me out, and you shall have any satisfaction you require. As your friend, Hugh Fitzwarine, I feel—yes, feel—the sneers levelled at the young Abbot, as he is called, of Stanmore Abbey, and have resented, with

that scorn a friend *should feel*, the imputations cast upon your character—a clown—a clod—a boon companion with grooms and keepers—a man without talents—ignorant, illiterate, unmannerly, and afraid, because unfitted to appear in genteel society. Such things are said of Hugh Fitzwarine, which John Newman can only deny—he cannot disprove. I have hurled defiance and contempt (he had done nothing of the kind) at those who have thus dared to malign your character, but that is not enough; Fitzwarine must now come forth and maintain his friend's character for truthfulness, as that friend has hitherto defended his."

"Yes, Newman, he will indeed, if you can forgive my hasty words just now."

"Give me your hand, Hugh, and resume your seat. You are a peppery lad sometimes, but there are occasions when I am obliged to rouse you up a little, *even* at the risk of being peppered myself. By the bye, Hugh, how did a certain fair damsel comport herself when her deliverer called the next morning, as in duty bound, to enquire if she felt any ill

effects from her rapid plunge into that confounded old moat?"

"I have not yet called there," he replied very gravely.

"Not called there!" repeated Newman, in well-feigned astonishment; "why, you wonderful compound of modesty and ferocity, why not?"

"Our families not visiting, I had not the honour of knowing either Mrs. or Miss Seaton."

"Well, sir, and whose fault is that? not theirs certainly, as Mrs. Seaton has only resided at Forest Lodge these last five years."

"My mother never visits any one, Newman."

"But that is no reason why her son should not, and you are now of an age to mix in the society of your neighbours; so I am resolved to take you in my drag to this archery meeting, where I expect lots of fun and frolic."

"I scarcely know what to say to your proposition, but would much rather decline going."

"Oh! no doubt of that. But now, Master Hugh, as I have set my mind on it, and am

resolved not to go without you, it rests with yourself to deprive me of a day's amusement, if you think proper."

"In that case, then, Newman, I am at your service."

"Many thanks, my boy, for that concession; so now fill your glass to the brim, and I will give a toast which I am sure you will drink with more than common pleasure—Florence Seaton!"

The tell-tale colour flushed across Hugh's expressive features as he silently raised the glass to his lips, and the contents immediately disappeared. Newman's quick eye detected the sudden change in his friend's face, but made no remark, and Hugh soon after rose to return home.

CHAPTER VII.

GRAND preparations were made at Maesmuir Park for the *féte champêtre*, to which all the principal families for many miles round were invited. Tents and marquees were pitched on the large lawn in front of the house, where ground was marked out for the toxophilites to display their skill with bow and arrow ; and appropriate prizes for ladies as well as gentlemen were provided for the successful competitors. A cold dinner was also laid out, after the games were over, to conclude with a ball and supper.

The company began to arrive soon after twelve o'clock, and the toxophilites com-

menced their flights at the target about two. A large crowd gathered round to witness their performances, the other portion of the visitors distributing themselves in the walks and drives about the place.

Newman's first attraction was the flower-garden, where he lingered with Hugh Fitzwarine for nearly two hours, investigating the merits of several new plants and flowers here presented to his view. Whilst standing thus together, their attention being riveted on a bed of very beautiful verbenas, another party approached them unperceived, and a hand was laid on Hugh's shoulder, which causing him to start round suddenly, he beheld the jovial face of the old Admiral, with a lady leaning on his arm.

“Hah! my young friend,” exclaimed he, holding out his hand, “I am delighted to meet you again, although I scarcely expected to have found you selecting the flower-garden in preference to the shooting-ground.”

“Archery, sir,” replied Hugh, “is only child's play, since the invention of powder and shot; and my friend here, being, like myself,

exceedingly fond of flowers, we both prefer the study of floriculture to the practice of bow and arrow."

" Well, Mr. Fitzwarine, and a very delightful study it is ; and now permit me to introduce you to Mrs. Seaton, who has long wished for the pleasure of your acquaintance."

The blood rushed instantly to Hugh's forehead, as with a low bow he raised his hat, but no word escaped his lips.

" Mr. Fitzwarine," said Mrs. Seaton extending her hand, " I have been indeed most anxious for this introduction to express personally my deep and grateful thanks to the preserver of my dear child's life."

" Indeed, Mrs. Seaton," replied Hugh, accepting her proffered hand, " you very much overrate my poor services on that occasion, which, from Major Sinclair being present, might be almost deemed an intrusion, my over-haste only preventing him plunging in to her rescue. No merit is therefore due to me, although I am most happy to have rendered Miss Seaton this trifling service."

" Trifling service, sir, do you call it, de-

scending a drop of thirty feet into that moat, and saving Florence from being drowned, as surely as I am now standing here ?”

“ You do not know perhaps, Admiral Bowen, that Major Sinclair was at the same moment about taking the same leap I did to Miss Seaton’s rescue, and prevented doing so only by the old gardener holding his arm.”

“ Yes, sir, I do know that, and more—tha Major Sinclair cannot swim a yard ; and therefore, except for your fortunate intervention, both most probably would have been drowned together ; you also had to dive to the bottom to bring Miss Seaton up, her riding habit having been kept down by a large stone which fell with her from the wall ; so you perceive, my young friend, I know rather more than you thought about this affair. But eh ! what’s become of Florence ? Confound that Major of Dragoons !— he has deserted the ship’s crew, and walked off with her.”

“ Then, Admiral,” remarked Newman, “ as you cannot sail very fast in pursuit with two convoys on hand, allow me to escort Mrs. Bowen,” as he politely offered his arm.

Major Sinclair, on hearing the Admiral address Hugh, had quietly pursued his walk with Florence on his arm, and mixing in the throng, quitted the garden for the archery ground, where, after half an hour's search, he was overhauled by the Admiral.

“Why, Major, you slipt your cable and parted company without saying, ‘with your leave, or by your leave.’”

“I suppose, Admiral, I am at liberty to take my cousin anywhere over the grounds without asking your permission.”

“Of course, sir, you are,” replied the Admiral, very bluffly; “but I don't consider it quite the thing, your deserting your party, when we all agreed at starting to keep together; and Mrs. Seaton wished her daughter to be introduced to Mr. Fitzwarine, with whom you saw us conversing in the flower-garden. Now, Florence, allow me the honour of presenting you to my young friend.”

The embarrassment of this young girl, on such an occasion, may be well imagined; but Fitzwarine's confusion was also very manifest, and on his raising his hat, his whole features were

exposed to view, tinged with the deepest scarlet. Florence for a moment raised her eyes to his, and read an expression there, which caused them instantly to seek the ground ; and she was stammering forth her thanks, which Hugh interrupted by saying, “ Pray, Miss Seaton, say not another word, for it is I who ought to feel, and do feel most thankful for the opportunity of rendering you that small service which has procured me the honour and great pleasure of an introduction to Mrs. Seaton and yourself.”

“ Well said, Hugh,” exclaimed Newman, patting him lightly on the back ; “ who, after hearing that speech, would call you again the young Abbot of Stanmore Abbey ? And now, my boy, suppose you have a shot at the target, as no one yet has hit home the bull’s eye.”

“ My archery days are past, Newman, and I should only be ridiculed now for my loss of skill.”

“ Pooh ! pooh ! Hugh, come take this bow, which a friend has kindly offered ; and if not for yourself, have one shot for Miss Seaton.

That golden arrow would make a pretty ornament for a lady."

"If Miss Seaton will do me the honour to accept the prize if won, I will try my best to gain it," he replied.

"Come, Florence, take him at his word," interposed the Admiral; "for I shall be proud to bear off the trophy to Forest Lodge."

"I shall be most happy then to accept it," she replied, blushing deeply.

Hugh needed no further encouragement, and taking the bow and arrow in his hands, drew it twice to prove it; then planting his left foot firmly forward, the bow was bent to the arrow's head, which, loosed suddenly from the string, pierced the centre of the bull's eye.

"Hurrah!" shouted the Admiral in an ecstasy of delight. "Well done!" was repeated by several lookers-on. "Whose mark is that?" enquired the umpire.

"Hugh Fitzwarine's, of Stanmore Abbey," replied Newman.

Lord Linton, who was standing near, on hearing Hugh's name, addressing him, said,—"I have the pleasure of knowing

Mrs. Fitzwarine, but not yourself, although I think we have met before."

"Yes, my Lord," replied Hugh, "I had the honour of being introduced to your Lordship when you dined with my uncle, Sir Marmaduke Dashwood, at Compton Castle, where I was staying last year."

"Oh! I remember now," replied Lord Linton; "pray give my best regards to Mrs. Fitzwarine, and say I shall do myself the honour of calling at the Abbey in a day or two."

At the termination of the shooting, the successful competitors were assembled in a small tent, to receive the prizes from the hands of Miss Medwyn, who started in surprise on beholding in the young Abbot, as she had contemptuously named Hugh, a handsome youth of most gentlemanly appearance.

"I have much pleasure," she said, with a most gracious smile, "in presenting Mr. Fitzwarine with this small prize which he has so skilfully won, and can only regret it is not better worth his acceptance."

"The most trifling trinket," replied Hugh, with a low bow, "presented by the hand of

Miss Medwyn, becomes a prize of the highest value in my sight."

Another gracious smile was Hugh's reward for this pretty compliment. He then withdrew in search of his friends outside the tent, of whom Newman alone remained ; Mrs. Seaton and her party having been carried off by the Honourable George to view the conservatory.

On hearing this intelligence, Hugh's looks betrayed his disappointment ; and placing his prize in Newman's hands, he said, rather pettishly, "There, Newman, is the arrow, as Miss Seaton does not appear to think it worth waiting to receive."

"Don't be out of temper, Hugh, because Miss Seaton was obliged to accompany her mother, although I could see very reluctantly."

"You may keep it yourself, or give it to her if you please," he replied carelessly ; "I shall not trouble myself more about it," as he turned aside to speak to a friend.

Newman, although vexed at Hugh's conduct, rightly divined the cause from which it proceeded, and merely said, "You will find

me in the smaller flower-garden near the conservatory," bent his steps in that direction, where he found Mrs. Seaton's party, with the Honourable George in close attendance, whom Sinclair wished at the bottom of the sea, from his having had the audacity to detach Miss Seaton from his side, by a dexterous manœuvre when passing through one of the forcing houses, and appropriate her to himself ; Sinclair, in turn, being under the necessity of offering his arm to Mrs. Bowen, to whom he proved the reverse of agreeable. In fact, the Major had been in what the Admiral called "the devil's own humour" ever since Hugh's introduction to Florence, which Medwyn's attention served in no way to diminish. Newman, on joining them, saw at a glance how matters stood, and resolving to cut out both the Honourable George and the Major, said, approaching Florence, "A particular friend of yours, Miss Seaton, on the archery ground, has been making enquiries for you ; will you allow me to escort you there, and we will then return to Mrs. Seaton ?"

"Now, Miss Seaton," said Newman, when

they had proceeded a few yards, “ all stratagems being considered fair in warfare of any kind, I have withdrawn you from the very flattering attentions of the Honourable George, and your cousin the Major, who have monopolized you the whole day, to have the pleasure of your society a short time ; to which I hope you will consider me, as an old neighbour, next entitled. I have also been entrusted with the prize won by my friend Hugh, who, by the way, I must confess, felt considerably mortified by your not condescending to receive it at his hands.”

“ Indeed, Mr. Newman, I wished very much to remain ; but Mr. Medwyn hurried us away to see the conservatory.”

“ Well, here is the arrow then,” producing it and placing it in her hands, “ which I will take charge of until your return home, should such be your pleasure.”

“ I am much obliged, Mr Newman, both to yourself and Mr. Fitzwarine for this pretty present, and with many thanks will accept your kind offer of keeping it for me until we leave.”

“For which trouble,” he said, “I shall expect a favour in return, the pleasure of dancing with you this evening.”

“I shall be most happy,” she replied, “the third dance, as I am engaged for the two first to Major Sinclair and Mr. Medwyn.”

Florence, being very fond of flowers, had received occasionally presents of these from Newman, sending others in return ; and she did not like refusing his request, although not exactly the person she would have selected as a partner in a ball-room.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEWMAN, having in vain searched for Hugh, was obliged to retrace his steps towards the flower-garden, when Miss Seaton enquired the name of the person who wished to see her.

“It was Hugh Fitzwarine I was seeking,” he replied—“who is like myself, I fear, of rather a proud spirit—in the hope to have made you better acquainted with each other.”

“Is he so ready to take offence then at trifles?” she asked.

“Not so—though, poor fellow, of most susceptible feelings; but a more kind, warm-hearted lad never existed.”

“I sincerely hope, Mr. Newman, he will

not believe I think lightly of his kind present, or that I shall ever cease to feel grateful for his saving my life."

"He is very diffident, Miss Seaton; and now, having resigned you to Mrs. Seaton, I will endeavour to fish him out among the crowd; at any rate, should we not meet before the dinner hour, remember your promise for the third dance."

"I shall not forget you," she replied.

Hugh, having met with a college friend and his sister, carefully avoided the Forest Lodge party until the dinner hour, thinking they had treated him rather cavalierly in the prize affair; and it was not till seated at the table almost opposite to them that Newman discovered his friend. A cold collation had been laid out in a large marquee on the lawn, after which an adjournment was made to the house for dancing, the whole lower suite of apartments being thrown open for that purpose. Hugh, with his friend's sister, happened to stand up in the first quadrille with Newman; and at the conclusion of the dance, the latter suddenly exclaimed—"Hugh, give me your

arm a moment, for I've got an attack of that confounded cramp”—with which he began grimacing and lifting his leg, as if suffering extreme pain.

“ Oh, oh !” cried Newman, “ lead me to a seat, Hugh, for these attacks are fearful ;” and apologizing to his partner, he threw himself into a chair.

“ What can I do, or obtain for you ?” enquired Hugh, beginning to be alarmed at Newman’s contortions and wry faces.

“ A glass of cold water, if possible,” he replied, for which Hugh ran off, and quickly returned with it. This seemed to revive Newman, who, thanking him for his attention, said, “ When you have disposed of the glass, Hugh, come to me again for a few minutes, as I wish you to do me another favour.”

“ Well, Newman, in what can I assist you further ?” he asked, on sitting down by his side.

“ In being my substitute to dance with a young lady to whom I am engaged for the third quadrille.”

“ Oh ! you will be quite well by that time to walk as you do through the figure.”

“ Not so, Hugh ; for these attacks are more serious than you suppose, and I dare not attempt even to walk through another dance this evening.”

“ Well, Newman, then who is the young lady ?”

“ Miss Seaton.”

“ She will find plenty of partners without me,” he replied.

“ Most likely, Hugh ; but being engaged to me, not yourself, she will, of course, have no other partner for that quadrille ; and if Hugh Fitzwarine will not oblige his old friend in such a trifle as this, Miss Seaton, sir, shall not sit down, if I drop on the floor. You refuse then to be my substitute ?” said Newman (as Hugh did not make any reply) ; and with another contortion he attempted to rise, when he was seized with another spasm.

“ Stay, Newman,—pray sit down—I will cheerfully do your bidding.”

“ Not a very disagreeable task, I think, to dance with the prettiest girl in the room,”

Newman replied in an offended tone. "Egad ! sir, young gentlemen in these days assume very extraordinary airs !"

"I intended no disrespect to Miss Seaton," he replied.

"Perhaps not ; yet had our cases been reversed, I had willingly danced with the plainest woman here to oblige you ; but now give me your arm, I must hobble away and explain to Miss Seaton how grieved I feel at my disappointment, and the necessity I am under of providing so disagreeable a substitute."

"Nay, sit down, I will find Miss Seaton and explain everything."

"Ask her to come here a moment then," he said.

Hugh soon accomplished his mission, finding the young lady just concluding her second dance with George Medwyn.

"I am commissioned," he said, approaching her, "by Mr. Newman, who is suffering from a sudden attack of cramp, and unable to seek you in person, to offer myself as his substitute for the next quadrille ;" and on offering his arm, the Honourable George withdrew.

" Newman has also expressed a wish to see you for a few moments," he then said, " if you will permit me to conduct you to him."

" Most willingly," she replied, " for I am quite grieved to hear of his indisposition ;" and after expressing her sympathy for him, Newman expatiated on his grievous disappointment in being unable to have the honour of dancing with her ; " and I fear," he added with a smile, " you will find but a poor substitute in my young friend here."

" Perhaps Miss Seaton would prefer some more agreeable partner then," Hugh observed.

" No, sir, I think not ; and even if she did," added Newman, " there is no time now to find one, the sets being nearly formed—so now be off, Master Hugh, and I hope you will remember whom you represent on this occasion, the most polite, courtier-like, accomplished, and handsome old bachelor in the British dominions."

Now it may be enquired why Newman should be so extremely solicitous to make Hugh Fitzwarine on the best terms with Florence Seaton ; and it must be admitted that it

arose more from a great dislike he had taken to Major Sinclair, than any great affection for Hugh himself; for the Major, seeing at a glance that Newman had few pretensions to the manners of a gentleman, although apparently a good-humoured, kind-hearted man, had treated his attempts to be on familiar terms with Florence as a piece of impertinence to his cousin, and had behaved towards him so haughtily as to excite his most bitter hatred. Seeing the Major's close attentions to Florence, he resolved to back Hugh Fitzwarine on, to cut him out of her good graces, although Hugh believed his conduct to proceed from disinterested regard for himself.

His friend's returning cheerfulness rallied Hugh into good humour with his beautiful partner, although he still felt a little piqued about the prize arrow; and Miss Seaton, guessing the cause of his very formal manner to her at first, said, on taking their places in the quadrille—"I hope, Mr. Fitzwarine, I have not offended you by not waiting to receive the pretty present you were kind enough to give me; but indeed it was not my fault, as I was

obliged to attend mamma to the conservatory."

"I am not offended, Miss Seaton," he replied, "although I confess to feeling a little disappointed at your not remaining to receive the prize for which I contended solely on your account."

"I am truly vexed, Mr. Fitzwarine, to have caused you the slightest annoyance; but pray believe me, it was not intentional, and surely you will not think me so ungrateful after your courageous conduct in saving me from a fearful fate. Oh! Mr. Fitzwarine," she added, seriously raising her tearful eyes to his, "as long as life is spared me, I shall feel that existence I owe to you."

"Nay, Miss Seaton, not to me, but to that God of mercy who sent me to your succour."

There was a deep pause for a few moments, during which Florence's eyes were fixed on the floor, but neither spoke. The same thoughts were at that instant passing through the minds, and the same sensations through the hearts of both.

"We have been strangers to each other

hitherto," continued Hugh in a low tone, "although neighbours, and I now begin to indulge the hope we may become friends."

"Oh!" she replied, blushing, "I have just cause to consider you a friend indeed."

From that moment a change came over Hugh Fitzwarine, and Florence thought she had never met with a more cheerful and pleasant companion than the young Abbot of Stanmore Abbey; and they were passing through the last figure of the dance, when he said playfully, "As I have now been acting solely as Newman's substitute in this quadrille, I hope you will grant me the favour of another on my own account?" to which a ready assent being given, Hugh, with many thanks, conducted her to Mrs. Seaton, who was sitting with the Admiral in the same room.

"Ah! my young friend," exclaimed the latter, "I am happy to see you have thrown aside the monk's cowl, and can trip it on the light fantastic toe."

"But it is not the first time I have been in a ball-room, Admiral."

"No, my boy, that I can perceive without

putting on my spectacles, but I'll engage you never danced with a more lovely partner than my pet now hanging on your arm."

"In that opinion we perfectly coincide," replied Hugh with a beaming smile; and turning to her mother, he said, "I trust Mrs. Seaton will not think me presuming in asking Miss Florence for a second dance, since, in that just concluded, I have been representing Mr. Newman, who, being seized with cramp, was unable to fulfil his engagement to Miss Seaton."

"Oh, certainly not, you have my full consent," said Mrs. Seaton with a smile; when Hugh, after expressing his thanks, withdrew.

"By Jove! Florence," remarked the Admiral, "that youngster has astonished more than my old eyes to-night, for I have heard at least fifty people asking who he is; and if you had heard their remarks, you would not be ashamed of dancing with him a second time."

"Indeed I am not, Admiral," she replied, with a deep blush.

"Quite right, my pet, for he is a quiet, gen-

tlemanlike young fellow, without any conceit or nonsense about him, and deuced good-looking into the bargain ; but here comes one of a different stamp,” as Sir Everard Hilston approached, with an affected simper, to claim the honour of Miss Seaton’s hand.

“ Confound that conceited ass !” exclaimed the Admiral, as he walked away with Florence ; “ I’ll swear that fool does not think small beer of himself—but I shall give her a hint not to accept every puppy that asks her.”

“ Florence is fond of dancing,” replied Mrs. Seaton ; “ and this being her first ball, she thinks, I suppose, that she ought to make the most of it.”

“ Ah !” growled the Admiral, “ she will soon grow wiser, I hope, than to accept every puppy who asks her to dance.”

Meanwhile Hugh had joined his friend Newman, whom he found in wonderful spirits for a man who had just been suffering such tortures ; now the fact was, he had never experienced a twinge of cramp that night, but being a good mimic as well as actor, Hugh, for whose especial benefit this farce was enacted,

was with several others completely deceived by his agonised grimaces and pretended spasms—neither was it Newman's intention to undeceive him. Knowing Hugh's disposition and incipient regard for Florence Seaton, he adopted this course to make them better acquainted ; and from watching their looks and manner when dancing together, he had the highest gratification in discovering that his *ruse* had succeeded even beyond his expectations.

“ Well, Hugh,” said Newman, “ I am glad to find the task I imposed upon you of dancing with Miss Seaton has not proved a very disagreeable one ; but who is her present partner ? He looks like a Jew, with his black hair and swarthy complexion.”

“ If not by birth, he is a Jew in disposition,” replied Hugh ; “ that is Sir Everard Hilston, Baronet, of Hawkwood Hall, about ten miles distant from this, who succeeded to a very large property, three years since, on the death of a miserly old uncle, from whom he inherits the property as well as his mean spirit. From our meeting often at College, I know him well. He is considered a great *parti* by money-

seeking mammas having daughters on hand, although known to be a decided flirt, always selecting the prettiest girl in the room, to whom he makes it a point to pay particular attention during the whole evening; and having a fine place, splendid fortune, and tolerable good looks, with a title to boot, he thinks himself quite irresistible to mammas, if not to their daughters. That is the character I hear of him from my friend Ramsey, who was staying at the same watering-place with him last summer, where he nearly broke the heart of a poor girl who was silly enough to fall in love with him; but having neither brothers nor friends to take her part, the scoundrel escaped scot-free."

"He shall not make a fool of my pet Florence though," exclaimed Newman, "or by Jove, sir, I'll shake his life out of him!"

"She has a cousin to defend her, Newman, which you appear to forget."

"Well, yes, she is tolerably safe, I suppose, whilst the Major remains at Forest Lodge; but I suspect his visit is now drawing to a close."

Sir Everard Hilston, on conducting Florence to Mrs. Seaton after the dance, continued talking with her for some time, much to the Admiral's disgust, who, being extreme in his sudden likings and dislikings, had taken a decided antipathy to Sir Everard, which was increased to fever heat when he heard him coolly ask Florence for another quadrille.

"I believe I am engaged," she replied.

"Quite sure you must be," chimed in the Admiral; "and the country dance you are to finish off with me."

"If you find, my dear," interposed her mother, "that there are more dances than you expected, you will, I dare say, accept Sir Everard for another."

Florence making no reply, her silence was taken for consent, and the Baronet expressing his thanks for the anticipated honour, made his retreat, as he fancied, with flying colours.

"Well," remarked Mrs. Seaton, "don't you think Sir Everard a very agreeable, gentleman-like person, with plenty to say?"

"Plenty of gammon, at least," growled the

Admiral ; “ but every nincompoop, with a large fortune, and title stuck on to his name, like a peacock’s feather in a jack-daw’s tail, becomes at once a very agreeable person in some people’s eyes.”

“ I fear, Admiral,” replied Mrs. Seaton, “ you have an attack of gout coming on, from your irritable humour to-night.”

“ I shall have a fit of a different kind, my dear Madam, if that Jew fellow pesters us with his company much more.”

“ Why do you dislike him so, Admiral ?”

“ Because, independent of a few other disagreeables, he reminds me so much of my old enemy Bony, that I long to have a shot at his figure-head.”

“ Well,” continued Mrs. Seaton, “ he certainly does bear a strong resemblance to the portraits I have seen of Napoleon Buonaparte.”

“ And devilish like him in disposition also, I’ll warrant,” added the Admiral, “ by the cast of his eye, bating his courage—cool, calculating, and cruel.”

The Admiral was not far wrong in his reck-

oning, as will appear from a dialogue between the Baronet and the Honourable George Medwyn when standing together and watching Florence whilst dancing.

“ Well, Hilston, I need not ask what you think of Miss Seaton, your admiration being too evident—but paws off, Pompey—I intend to have that girl myself, provided it is all right about her uncle.”

“ What of him, Medwyn ?”

“ Lots of tin, they say, besides landed estates, which all fall to this young lady, as he is unmarried still.”

“ Old, of course ?”

“ Yes ; and Chaffman says in wretched health—not a bad spec. in these hard times—eh, Hilston ?”

“ Oh ! no ; but she’ll do for you when I’ve done with her,” said Hilston.

“ You’re a deuced cool hand, my boy, and a d—d fool into the bargain, if you fancy I am going to play second fiddle to Sir Everard Hilston.”

“ Well, Medwyn, just listen to me a moment. I am not in love with Miss Seaton,

although she appears almost perfection as to loveliness of person. She has beautiful features, and her figure is quite the thing I so much admire. In short, taking her altogether, I do not think I have ever seen a prettier girl, although admitting that I have been smitten rather sharply once or twice before ; but somehow or other it has always happened that, when I have found the game in my own hands, the disposition on my part has been wanting to play it out ; and I may confess to you that, when quite sure of a girl's affections, the idea of a nursery full of children has always so disgusted me, that I could advance no further. The thoughts of marriage, with its disagreeable concomitants, tend to break the spell of fascination which had been cast around me ; and although I revel in contemplating the budding charms of youthful beauty, yet the very name of Hymen scares me at last. This most probably will be again the case with Miss Seaton ; so you have little cause to fear me. For the present, my attentions will keep others, perhaps, at a distance ; and if I cannot make up my mind

to proceed to extremities, *i. e.* submit to the knot matrimonial—of which the prospect with my present feelings is very remote—you can step in when I beat a retreat; and she will be sure to marry you offhand in a fit of pique."

"Very complimentary indeed to my *amour propre*, Hilston; but, with all deference to your modest pretensions, I think my chance of winning the young lady's approving smiles quite as good as yours."

"Oh! no doubt, Medwyn, much better; and if you are really serious, I will proceed no further."

"No, no, old fellow—you know I must have money. As for love, I have had enough of that already, *usque ad nauseam*; but we need not quarrel about this girl; you win her, if you can; so will I—provided her money is safe—not otherwise."

It may suffice to say, the baronet gained his point (by close attendance on Mrs. Seaton) of a second dance with her daughter; he had also the pleasure of handing her to the carriage, notwithstanding the threatening aspects

of the Admiral and Major. But did another thought of Sir Everard Hilston cross the mind of Florence Seaton that night? No—not one. She thought and dreamt only of Hugh Fitzwarine.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next afternoon, about three o'clock, Hugh rode over to pay his first visit at Forest Lodge, where he was received most cordially by Mrs. Seaton and the Admiral, and invited to dine there the following day, which, greatly to Florence's joy, he accepted.

The whole party were seated in the drawing-room, when a smart britzka, with two splendid bay horses, drove up to the door, and Sir Everard Hilston and Mr. Medwyn were ushered in by old Donald. After the usual salutations, compliments, and enquiries by her partners of the preceding night as to

the state of Miss Seaton's health, &c., which were answered very satisfactorily, Sir Everard made the discovery of Hugh's presence.

"Ah! Fitzwarine, didn't see you before. How d'ye do?" with a familiar nod, as he placed himself next to Miss Seaton. "Heard you were living somewhere hereabouts in an old ruined abbey, with none but owls and bats for your companions. Give you a call, *en passant*, some day, old fellow."

"When that happens," replied Hugh, with a quiet, determined look, full of scorn, "I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that another owl has been added to our family party at Stanmore Abbey."

"Eh! old fellow, you appear inclined to be witty this morning at my expense."

"And you, sir, to be impertinent at mine," Hugh replied, with his eye fixed on the baronet, which made him quail again.

"Eh! 'pon my word, Fitzwarine, I meant no offence."

"I hope not, Hilston—although you have a quaint mode of expressing yourself sometimes."

The old Admiral looked joyously, and rubbed his hands with glee, at this sudden rebuke from his friend Hugh ; and even Major Sinclair's features relaxed into a smile. The Baronet seemed sheepish and confused by the side of Florence. Mrs. Seaton became grave ; and Medwyn, pulling out his watch, proposed their return home, as he was expecting a visit from some of his constituents. Sir Everard was not slow to take the hint, and the two worthies took their departure accordingly.

On their leaving the room, Hugh apologized to Mrs. Seaton for using the language he did in ladies' company ; but he added, "The poor old abbey is hallowed by my dear suffering mother's presence ; and I hope you and Miss Seaton will pardon my expressing myself rather indignantly at what I considered an insult to her."

"Give me your hand, my boy," exclaimed the Admiral, springing forward. "Your filial feelings do credit to your heart ; and would to heaven I had such a son ! I would not have lost the cut you gave that puppy for fifty pounds ; and I'll warrant he will keep

clear of you for the future. Now let us have a mouthful of fresh air, my dear madam ; for Florence looks as if a walk would freshen her up, after last night's stewing in those hot rooms ; and Hugh—I beg your pardon—Mr. Fitzwarine will, I hope, bear us company.”

“ My friends call me Hugh, sir,” he replied ; “ and I should feel proud to be thus addressed by Admiral Bowen.”

“ And so you shall, my gallant Hugh, from this day forward.”

The party was so disposed—the Admiral escorting Mrs. Seaton, and the Major constrained to offer the like attention to Mrs. Bowen—that Florence and Hugh were left to walk side by side through the meandering paths, which admitted of only two abreast of each other ; and how we know not, save from the very interesting nature of their conversation, a considerable space soon intervened between them and their party. Oblivious of time, they still walked on, until the village clock struck five, when Florence exclaimed, “ What has become of mamma ? She must have returned by another path leading from

the glen ; but by this narrow track, although rather steep, we may overtake her ;” and she began quickly to descend this rugged way, when her foot slipped, and she was saved by Hugh’s arm from falling.

“ How very awkward I am ! ” she said, springing from him like a fawn, whilst the deepest blush suffused her cheeks.

“ And how fortunate I have been,” he replied, “ in saving Miss Seaton from an accident ! But pray accept my arm down this declivity.”

“ Oh, no, thank you, I shall be more careful now.”

“ You disdain my proffered aid, then, as a friend, and would still make me feel that I must not presume on a more intimate acquaintance ? ”

“ Indeed, those are not my feelings,” she added ; “ have I not good cause to consider the preserver of my life my best friend ? And to convince you that such is the case, I will accept that assistance from you I would decline from a new acquaintance, by taking your arm.”

“Indeed, Miss Seaton, greatly as I prize that honour, I would not accept it at the expense of being thought too forward or presuming on the trifling service I was once fortunate enough to render you; and believe me, my sole object in offering you my arm was to save you from another fall down this steep bank. When the risk is passed, I shall resume my former distance.”

“Now then, Mr. Fitzwarine, I see you are offended with me.”

“I trust, Miss Seaton, I am not so unreasonable as to be offended with your sense of propriety, which I respect most highly.”

“Well,” she said, with a gay smile, “then I shall require your arm again up the next ascent; but when we are on level ground, I may be safely trusted to walk alone.”

“For the present,” he said, cheerfully, “I will agree to these terms; but the next time we walk together, I shall conduct you through all the steepest parts of the glen.”

Thus, in high good-humour, they quickly overtook their party; and Hugh was soon

after on his homeward track, galloping happily along, with a light heart.

The next evening, Hugh reached Forest Lodge nearly half an hour before dinner ; and the first person who entered the drawing-room was Florence, who started on beholding him about whom her thoughts had been engaged since the previous night.

“ I am unfashionably early,” he remarked, on seeing her changing colour ; “ but I grasp with avidity every moment permitted me to spend in Miss Seaton’s society.”

“ If Mr. Fitzwarine thinks such flattering speeches agreeable to me, he is much mistaken in my character,” she replied ; “ such I am taught to expect from ball-room partners, —but they are not pleasant to hear from friends.”

“ My ball-room style of speech was adopted to suit your formal reception of me this evening. I have two characters to maintain : to acquaintances who would keep me at arm’s length,” he said, with a smile, and emphasis on the word *arm*, “ I am the polite Mr. Fitzwarine ; to those in whom I feel a deeper

interest, I would be plain-speaking Hugh Fitzwarine only. In which character does Miss Seaton like me best?"

"Not in the former, certainly," she said.

"Well, then, will you accept my hand, which you refused just now, in token of the league to exist between us for the future, of amity and candour?"

On her taking his hand, he said, "Still, you are not the stranger to me you suppose; for night after night I have watched you, when walking in the glen, for these last two months past, and hovered near your retreating footsteps until you reached home, lest you might be molested by the poachers who infest the Forest. And think me not intrusive, Miss Seaton, when I tell you that, when lying in ambush one night for deer, two poachers stood near me unperceived, one of whom asked the other if he thought Miss Seaton carried her purse about her. 'I don't know, Jack,' replied his companion, 'but there ain't much harm in axing her the question, when ours be empty.' From that night, Miss Seaton, with my gun in hand, I resolved to

protect you from harm, until your cousin's arrival, when I knew you would not be left to take a solitary ramble."

"I am, indeed, most thankful for your kind protection, but I will never again venture in that glen alone."

"You are secure now," he replied, "since last night I met one of these poachers on my return from this place, and told him what I had overheard him say. 'I didn't know, sir,' he replied, 'that you visited the family at Forest Lodge. But now the young lady's safe to walk the woods till midnight.' And these men dare not break their word to me."

Their conversation was interrupted by Major Sinclair, whose rigidity of manner relaxing towards Hugh, he offered him his hand; and he was soon followed by Mrs. Seaton and her guests.

Hugh had the pleasure of handing Florence into dinner, his light, joyous spirits and animated conversation being a surprise to all; and Florence could not forbear stealing a glance at his handsome features, now lit up by such unexpected brilliancy.

“ Why, Donald ! another dish of fine trout to-day,” exclaimed the Admiral ; “ I should think that wee rill of yours would scarcely cover such fish as these.”

“ A wee bit lower down, your honour, the stream is more deep and wide.”

“ Yes, Donald, I know that full well. But you’ve little time for angling, I guess ?”

“ They’re all lawfu’ come by, your honour, natheless.”

“ No doubt, Donald. But the fisherman who supplies our table is now partaking of his own trout, or I am out of my reckoning.”

Donald made no reply, but cast a wistful glance at Hugh, who appeared too intent on his plate to notice this allusion to himself.

“ Is it not so, my friend Hugh, that these splendid fish come from the Abbey stream ?”

“ It may be so, sir,” replied Hugh.

“ And caught by your hand, my boy !”

“ Well, Admiral, the fact is, that this being the same stream which rises on Mrs. Seaton’s property, and flows by the Abbey, my friend Donald and myself have entered into an alliance, offensive and defensive, against poachers.

He preserves the fish when young at the source, and I lower down ; and when I have a day's fishing, the spoil is divided between us."

" Ay, ay, Master Hugh ;—I quite comprehend your plan, and a very notable one it is."

" I am glad to find you approve of it, Admiral."

" Oh, certainly ; and I suppose the leverets and young rabbits are supplied us on the same conditions ?"

" Yes, Admiral ; our keeper and Donald, being both natives of the land o' cakes, keep a sharp look-out after the game also."

" Well, I must confess Donald is a wonderful man for his years,—butler, head-gardener, do. coachman, do. groom and keeper also. Egad, sir ! friend Donald has his hands full of business."

" And not o'er muckle warked wi' a', your honour."

" No, perhaps not, as far as the night-watch for game and fish goes. But now, Master Hugh, you shall hear my version of the story. There is a certain modest young man, living

not many miles from Forest Lodge, whose kind heart has prompted him to send fish and game to the ladies of that establishment, through the hands of their servant, but unknown to them, because he thought they might have refused it at his hands."

The tell-tale colour diffused itself over Hugh's features as he quickly added, "No, no, Admiral! I do what is only just and fair to my neighbours; for it would be of little use my attempting to preserve game or fish without Mrs. Seaton's co-operation, as our properties join; and before having the honour of her acquaintance, this arrangement was made between her faithful servant and myself, by which both are mutually benefited. That is a fair statement of the case, Admiral; and now, Donald, I must ask you for a glass of your home-brewed beer."

As the old man handed him a large beaker, frothed to the top, he whispered, although loud enough to catch the Admiral's ear,—

"Dinna drink it a', Master Hugh, or it will blaw yer head off!"

“Hah ! hah ! capital, indeed !” shouted the Admiral.

“What is it ?” enquired Mrs. Seaton ; “let us know the joke.”

“Why, Donald, in handing Mr. Fitzwarine a glass of beer, whispers not to drink it all, or it would blaw his head off.”

This excited some merriment at the old man’s expense ; when Hugh added, after tasting the beer, “Donald’s caution was not unnecessary, since it is as strong as brandy.”

The dinner-hour passed quickly away, and on joining the ladies in the drawing-room, the Major exacted from Florence some of his old favourite songs, and she was so closely attended by her cousin the rest of the evening, that Hugh was completely barred off from further access to her ; and after sitting conversing with Mrs. Seaton until the clock on the mantel-piece told the hour of ten, he rose to take leave, and on shaking hands with her said, “I have to thank you, Mrs. Seaton, for one of the most delightful evenings I have ever spent.”

“Then I hope, Mr. Fitzwarine, as you

have at last found your way to Forest Lodge, we shall have the pleasure of seeing you here very soon again."

"I fear you will now find me a very troublesome visitor," he replied.

"No, no, Mr. Fitzwarine, we have been too long strangers, and now you must make up for lost time."

"I shall not be slow, my dear madam, to avail myself of your kindness." And again offering his hand, he wished her good night; and then turning to Florence, his hand was accepted, notwithstanding the Major's defiant looks; and with a grasp from the Admiral in passing the door, Hugh Fitzwarine was gone.

"Now, my dear madam," asked the Admiral, "what think you of my *protégé*, the young Abbot?"

"Indeed, Admiral, he is one of the most aristocratic-looking and agreeable young men I have ever known."

"And so good-looking," interposed Mrs. Bowen; "such a manly countenance, and such brilliant dark eyes, and nice curly hair, with such a winning smile. Oh, Ad-

miral ! he reminds me so of yourself when a young man !”

“ Ah, my dear, I dare say people called me a handsome, smart-looking lad fifty odd years ago.”

From that time Hugh Fitzwarine became a frequent visitor at Forest Lodge, greatly to the delight of every inmate there, save the Major, whose lowering looks betokened anything but pleasure when his name was announced ; in short, Sinclair observed, with a lover’s keen perception, a gradual but decided alteration in his cousin’s manner towards himself, which he attributed to the right cause—a growing preference for the society of Hugh Fitzwarine, which her varying colour and tell-tale eyes revealed too clearly to his sickening sight.

Sir Edward Hilston had also called three times within the last fortnight, and his attentions and admiration of Florence being too evident to be mistaken, Mrs. Seaton appeared inclined to give him every encouragement. Under such circumstances, some men would have been impatient to know their fate by a

declaration of their love, but Major Sinclair believed he would not be rejected ; he knew already Florence's deep attachment to himself, and her unselfish disposition, which would induce her to yield up her own happiness for his. He knew she would cheerfully sacrifice her own peace of mind and all her prospects, rather than inflict pain on himself; but his eyes had been now opened to their real position—Florence loved him as she would have loved a brother. Major Sinclair possessed a mind too generous and noble to hesitate for a moment how to act ; and his resolution was taken to leave Forest Lodge immediately, without divulging the secret of his heart to Florence, the knowledge of which would cause her so much misery. Sinclair judged his cousin rightly ; she loved him next to her mother—before all human kind, but it was with the strong attachment of a sister—other love and its effects she had never yet experienced towards any man, until she had become acquainted with Hugh Fitzwarine, and her feelings towards him were as yet almost inexplicable to herself.

Sinclair was slow in deliberation, but prompt in action; and having resolved to leave Forest Lodge, he at once communicated his intentions to Mrs. Seaton the next morning at breakfast, having received an invitation from his friend Colonel Herbert to pay him and his relations his promised visit, which afforded him an excellent excuse for his rather abrupt departure, from which neither Mrs. Seaton's remonstrances nor the entreaties of Florence could divert him, although as a compromise he consented to remain three days longer in what had now become to him a very painful position.

CHAPTER X.

THE time fixed for the Heddington election had now arrived, and from the exertions made by both parties, a fearful contest was expected between the Whig and Tory candidates ; for in those days a contested election was something for any man, ambitious of that honour, to remember to the last day of his existence, from the enormous expenses attending it. In this a very necessary reform has taken place, elections having become very tame affairs, in comparison with those of the olden time, when all was bustle, fun, and jollity ; and if bribery and corruption, as they are called, were practised, they were at least *openly* practised, not

as now, secretly, in an underhand manner ; and although the fact of a man selling his vote militates against our fine-spun ideas of patriotism, yet the passing of a law to prevent such practices has proved inoperative, by the continual exposure of acts of this kind at almost every contested election for county or borough during the present enlightened century, which can boast, and does boast, of more robbery, and cheating than any other, or all the other centuries put together since the creation of this world.

The moral turpitude of vote-selling is not half so great as that of spurious goods selling, now so generally and openly practised, to the wholesale defrauding and destruction of mankind. The man who sells his vote does not injure his neighbour by so doing, and the evil of this practice, even without the intervention of the legislature, would gradually have worked its own cure. Now that the polling-places are within easy distances, there are fewer excuses for country electors requiring compensation for travelling expenses and loss of time, to which, in a common-sense point of view,

they were reasonably entitled. A small farmer or tradesman might justly have said formerly, “ I cannot afford to leave my business for two or three days, on a journey of thirty miles or so, to the polling-place, without being paid for what I am out of pocket, although I would willingly give my vote to the candidate I prefer at my own door for nothing.”

In those times men were obliged to work very hard for a competency in old age, but a wholesale business now is only another and disguised name for wholesale robbery ; a clever man of business means literally a deep, artful rogue, who possesses the greatest faculty for abstracting his neighbour’s money out of his pocket and transferring it to his own. The spirit of this age is spoliation ; the rapid acquisition of money by every means the cupidity of man can devise.

There is an old yet very true saying, “ That the greatest rogue generally turns king’s evidence ;” and the greatest outcry is raised against corrupt practices at elections by those who have obtained a seat in the House of Commons by their own malpractices.

On the day of nomination, the hustings being erected in the market-place at Heddington, a third candidate presented himself, professing ultra-radical opinions, and styling himself “the friend of the people,” in the person of Captain Humphrey, a retired naval officer, whose attempt at speechifying created great amusement for his especial supporters, “the unwashed,” who, having a holiday on this occasion, resolved to enjoy it with fun and frolic, by pelting the candidates with rotten eggs, and other unpleasant missiles.

The Captain was a short, stout man, with a florid complexion, and of fierce-looking visage, but possessing a very squeaky voice. Being unaccustomed to public speaking, he had got up an oration for the occasion by heart ; but when stepping forth on the platform to address the moving sea of heads below, his sight became so dazzled, and his memory so bothered, that he was obliged to shut his eyes, in the hope of recollecting what he had prepared to say. The Captain commenced with—“ Gentlemen, friends, and fellow-countrymen,”—when a voice from the crowd

shouted—" Speak up, I'm hard of hearing." " Open your eyes," shouted another, " let's see the colour on 'em."

The Captain recommenced in a higher key, as before, " Friends and fellow countrymen—"

A voice from the crowd—" You're an Irishman."

" I am not an Irishman," retorted the Captain.

" Then you're a Welshman," cried another, chaunting out :—

" Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief,
Taffy came to my house, and stole a shin of beef ;
I goes to Taffy's house, Taffy warn't at home,
Taffy comes to my house and prigs a mutton bone."

Roars of laughter followed from all sides, during which the Captain stood still, with his eyes shut.

" Open your peepers!" was again vociferated, and failing to do as desired, a rotten egg was discharged full in his face, which produced the instantaneous effect of opening both his eyes and mouth, the latter, with an oath, challenging the perpetrator of the outrage to

come up there, and he would give him a good licking.

“ Hurroar !” shouted the mob, “ go it, you cripples !” on which followed another volley of eggs, bespattering the Captain all over from head to foot.

Another violent explosion from “ the Friend of the People,” sending them all to the devil and back again, whereat another burst of merriment arose from the unwashed.

“ Go it, Captain ! keep the pot a-biling !” with such like short, pithy, and witty expressions.

“ I *will* be heard !” screamed the Captain, “ if I stay here till midught !”

“ No you shan’t, you son of a sea-cook !” was again shouted out. “ Give him some more egg sarce !”

Which to avoid, the Captain ducked his head, turning right about, when his coat receiving the offensive discharge, presented the appearance of being daubed with yellow ochre.

More anathemas from the Captain, with violent gesticulations of hands and arms at those below, which elicited renewed shouts.

The Mayor then came forward to beg a fair hearing for him, saying, with great good humour—"Now, my friends, you have had your fun out at Captain Humphrey's expense, let him have his say out."

"So he shall," was the reply, "if he'll keep a civil tongue in his head."

"Now then, Captain dear," cried a shrill voice, imitating his own, "clear your pipes, and I'll ax ye a question or two.—How about wote by ballot?"

"I am for vote by ballot," was the answer.

"Werry good, Captain,—'varsal suffrage?"

"To that I agree also, my friend," said the Captain, beginning to recover his temper.

"Cheap bread?"

"I'll do away with the corn laws directly."

"Hurroar!" from the crowd—"that's your sort! go it, Captain!—Church rates?"

"Abolish them altogether."

Another shout from the people—"How about the Bishops?"

"Kick them out of the House of Lords!"

"Werry well, Captain," continued his in-

terrogator ; “ but now, what’s your opinion on flogging soldiers, and the press-gang ? ”

“ Discipline must be maintained in the army, and seamen provided for the navy,” replied the Captain.

“ Off ! off ! off ! ” shouted several at once. “ Give him the cat himself ! ” shrieked the shrill voice ; on which a dead one was hurled at his head, with such precision as to knock him off his legs, and amidst yells, catcalls, and noises of various kinds, accompanied with a shower of missiles, the discomfited “ friend of the people ” was obliged to make a quick retreat from the hustings ; this warm reception from his humble friends so exasperating him, that, after denouncing them *en masse* as a d—d set of cowardly ruffians, he forthwith declared his intention of retiring from the contest ; having previously discovered that his chance of representing the Borough of Heddington was extremely remote.

The Honourable George Medwyn now presented himself, and had scarcely stood forward to begin his say, when a voice from the crowd shouted—“ Well, George, how be you ? ”

“ Hearty, my boy. How’s your missus, John, and the brats?”

This ready, good-humoured answer elicited shouts of laughter from the mob.

“ Now, George,” continued the same voice, “ you knows your catechism, I ’spose ?”

“ No, I don’t,” was the reply, “ I’ve forgot all about it.”

“ Wery well—then what do you say about wote by ballot ?”

“ I won’t have vote by ballot at no price,” replied the Honorable George.

“ You won’t ?” asked his questioner.

“ No, I won’t, Governor, and that’s plain enough ; it’s a cowardly, underhand, un-English custom, like stabbing a man in the dark—none of your foreigneering tricks for me, I like a good stand-up fight in open day.”

“ Hurroar ! George—that’s the ticket,” cried several voices.

When silence was obtained, his questioner asked—

“ How about a cheap loaf ?”

“ With all my heart—I’ll vote for the abolition of the Corn Laws.”

“ Werry good, George—how about Tithes?”

“ Make the landlords pay them.”

“ ’Varsal suffrage?”

“ I haven’t made up my mind on that point yet,” replied Medwyn.

“ Then you wouldn’t like some egg sarce to settle it, George, would you?”

“ Hang your egg sauce,” said George. “ I don’t care a rap for it—now, my lads,” slipping on an old drab mackintosh—“ fire away!”

Shouts of laughter followed this act, but not an egg was discharged at him.

“ He’s a trump,” was vociferated. “ He shan’t have no egg-sauce.”

“ Thank’e, my lads,” said Medwyn, “ you know I’ll do the best I can for you all, but I ain’t Prime Minister yet.”

“ Well, George, how about the cat?” continued his persecutor; “ flogging in the army?”

“ I got flogging enough myself when a boy, and didn’t half like it,” replied Medwyn;

“and I don’t hold with flogging anybody, much less a poor soldier who gets monkey’s allowance, more kicks than halfpence.”

Loud hurrahs followed this announcement, with cries of “ You’ll do, George—Medwyn for ever !”

The Tory candidate, Mr. Hopkins, who had represented the Borough for many years, now advanced to address the electors, amidst yells from the Medwyn party, which for some time prevented him being heard ; when the Honorable George cried out—“ Fair play, my friends, is my motto ; every man has a right to be heard in his own defence ;” by which the uproar was immediately hushed, and Mr. Hopkins allowed to proceed.

“ Here I am, my friends, before you, again returned on your hands like a damaged bale of goods, to be furbished up, and sent back to the big house up yonder.”

A voice from the crowd—“ You won’t go there no more, neighbour Hopkins—you ba’ant any good to the people.”

“ Then who built the Market House, to shelter your wives and children in bad wea-

ther? Who supplies the poor of your town with blankets and clothing every Christmas? Who employs more labourers on his estate than John Hopkins? and who says he's not a friend of the people? Let me see the man who will tell me this to my face."

" You be werry good to the poor, neighbour Hopkins, we don't deny it, werry good at home; but we wants reform, and mean to have it, too."

" My friends," continued Hopkins, " I shall not vote for the abolition of the Corn Laws, because free trade in corn won't give you a cheap loaf. The trade will then fall into the hands of factors, and you'll live to see my words verified. You won't get bread cheaper than now—but I will agree to this measure being passed, if my Honorable Opponent here will agree to abolish the Malt Tax, that the poor man may have his chance of a good and cheap glass of beer, as well as a cheap loaf of bread."

The Honorable George not promising to agree to this, caused some dissatisfaction among his supporters—and Hopkins was

allowed to finish his speech without molestation.

The election was conducted throughout with good humour on both sides, save and except a few street rows between the opposite factions, when a trifle excited by the extract from malt and hops, which circulated very freely, as heretofore during election time at Heddington.

Squibs and crackers, cracked heads also, were bandied about from side to side, as in a game at football between school-boys, when kicks are dealt out pretty freely on opposing shins, with the utmost good-humour.

An old farmer from the country, who had a vote for the Borough, occasioned also considerable merriment by trying to work his way on horseback through the crowd to the polling booth. It was the fashion in those times for electors to nail their colours to the mast, *i. e.* pin them to hat or coat ; but Farmer Stubbins intending to give a plumper to Mr. Hopkins, and entertaining a wholesome dread of the Philistines or *Achivi*, in other words the populace, who vehemently espoused the cause of

Medwyn, he thought to escape any passing compliments, by showing no ribbons at all; but some of the people being acquainted with the old man's physiognomy, and suspecting his trick, resolved on a little fun at his expense, by stopping his horse, and desiring him to produce his colours.

“I ha’n’t got none,” replied he.

Mob. “Then who’s your man?”

Farmer. “I shan’t tell ye.”

Mob. “But you shall.”

Farmer. “Won’t : let go the bridle, or I’ll give ye a taste o’ the crabstick.”

Mob. “Hurroar, Farmer, keep your temper, if you’d keep your seat ; Medwyn for ever.”

Farmer, getting out of temper, lets fly the crabstick at the heads of those holding the reins.

Mob. “Drop that suit, old Crusty, you ain’t at home in the barn a-thrashing banes. Pull him off his hoss—” on which one more expert at this trick, dragging him hard by the leg, and then suddenly jerking it back, the old man was immediately capsized, and lay

sprawling on his back, shouting “murder!” with all his might, on which a rotten egg was administered to stop his voice.

“Hold your noise, you wicked old warmint!” cried one of his assailants, “or we’ll stop your cackle altogether. Here’s your colour,” tying a piece of yellow ribbon in his button-hole, “and mind you wotes for Medwyn;” when, being mounted again on his horse, he was conducted forward to the opposite booth, and so hurried and so bothered, that he voted as desired, for the wrong man, amidst the deafening cheers of the mob; whose favourite, on the close of the contest, stood at the head of the poll by a large majority.

CHAPTER XI.

IN the world we meet with few men possessing the high moral courage of Major Sinclair, who would consent to forego so quietly all the advantage he had obtained, and the influence he knew he possessed with Florence. There certainly can be no greater trial to any man than resigning that woman in whom all his hopes of happiness are centered. Why, or wherefore, it is needless to inquire ; but the history of the world confirms the fact, that the love of woman transcends every other passion to which man is heir : when once his affections have been fixed on that object which his fancy has invested with

almost divine perfections, no obstacle can arrest the headlong progress of his desire to obtain this coveted possession. In the sacred Scripture history, we read that “ Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.” And again, for Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, we find Schechim, a prince of the Hivites, pleading to her father and brothers in these words : “ Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me ; but give me the damsel to wife.” And we read of Abraham on two occasions representing Sarah as his sister, because he thought, as he expressed himself to Abimelech, “ Surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife’s sake.” Abraham might have had good cause to dread the influence his wife’s beauty would exercise over the heathen Pharaoh, but much less to fear from Abimelech, king of Palestine, who professed himself and people to be “ a righteous nation,” and who, when reproved on her account, justifies his honest intentions before God thus : “ Said he not

unto me, she is my sister? and she, even she herself, said he is my brother; in the integrity of my heart, and innocence of my hands, have I done this." What, then, would Abraham have thought of his descendant David, a man after God's heart, giving way to his unbridled passion, and slaying Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon, to get possession of his wife?

From these and many other instances which might be cited from the Book of Books, may be seen the power which love and passion hold over the human heart, bringing all other feelings, for the time, into subjection to their tyranny.

In the poetry and prose of almost every nation under the sun, love is portrayed as the all-absorbing, all-governing passion of the human race, by which heroes and heroines are alike subdued—to which the prince and the peasant are equally subservient; and few there are, when even unlawful love has seized upon their hearts, who would pause, like Joseph, to ask themselves this question, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against

God?" But love, pure, unselfish love, unsullied by passion, which nearly every human being experiences once in his or her life, is undoubtedly of Divine origin, ennobling the mind, and filling the heart with lofty feelings. It appears to be (with deference be it spoken) a spark of that Holy Love which animates celestial beings; it is a song which may be sung by saints on earth, and chanted by angels in heaven.

The evening before his departure from Forest Lodge, Major Sinclair took his final stroll with Florence through the glen. Both were unusually silent and sad. A melancholy foreboding had seized upon Sinclair's mind, that he never again should tread that pathway by the side of Florence Seaton, and that this would be their last walk together on earth. Rousing himself by a violent effort to dispel these gloomy anticipations, he resolved that his last interview with his cousin should be spent in forewarning her of what he believed to be the evil to come.

"Florence," he said, abruptly, "my guardian spirit whispers me that this will be our

last meeting in this world ; and as you have ever been to me a dear, confiding sister, listen calmly to my parting advice."

" Oh, Henry !" she exclaimed, interrupting him, " why indulge such melancholy thoughts ? Surely we shall meet again, and often ; even now, why should you leave us ?"

" Leave you I must now, dear girl, having promised a visit to my friend Herbert, whom I cannot disappoint."

" Then why cannot you return to us again, after staying a short time with your friend ? You must know, dear Henry, what happiness this would confer on mamma and myself. Promise me, then, to return."

" I have business of importance, which will call me, I fear, far hence, dear girl ; yet, if permitted, I will see you once more before leaving this part of the country. But as the future is dark to us all, I must not lose these precious moments now allotted me ; and if I do speak rather too plainly, my own sweet cousin will, I know, attribute it to the true motive which has ever been uppermost in my thoughts—my earnest desire for her happiness

in this life, as well as in the life to come. It is natural to expect, my dear Florence, that your beauty and amiable disposition will attract many admirers wherever you go ; but I trust that your own good sense, and religious principles, will prove of sufficient strength to guard your young mind from being led astray by vanity or pride. All we possess—mental or personal endowments, wealth and honours—are talents entrusted to our care, for the right use of which we shall be held responsible hereafter. We have nothing to boast of—all are God's free gifts, lent to us for a season, with this condition, 'occupy till I come.' Our bodies are the temples of the living God, in which and by which we are to glorify our Creator, in rendering them subservient to his commands, and keeping them unspotted and unpolluted by the sins and vices of the world. On that world, dear Florence, you are now entering ; and although I would not debar you from the enjoyment of those pleasures and amusements in which you may join to a certain extent without injury to yourself, yet I must warn you against their

too frequent indulgence, which will assuredly distract your attention from more serious subjects. On this point, however, it may be superfluous for me to say more, as you have a most excellent and prudent mother, who will prove your best friend and guide. And now, my dear Florence, you will, I know, excuse my alluding to another subject, in which young girls' minds are said to be more particularly interested. From my own observation, I am led to believe that you have already attracted the admiration of three gentlemen in this neighbourhood, who have all paid you very marked attentions; but, having a tolerable insight into the human character, from my long acquaintance with the world, I do not think that either Mr. Medwyn, Sir Everard Hilston, or Mr. Fitzwarine, likely to conduce to the permanent happiness of any sensible, religious woman. Medwyn, from what I hear currently reported, is a man of bad reputation—a spendthrift and gambler, with whom happiness would be entirely out of the question. Sir Everard, although very wealthy, with a fine place, is a gay man of

the world, flirting, frivolous, and fanciful, without either religion or moral principles ; and although he has contrived, by his good manners and address, to win your mother's approbation, who can only judge from external appearances, yet I must earnestly caution you, my dear girl, never to entrust your happiness to his keeping, for he will assuredly prove a bad husband. Lastly,—I can only speak of Mr. Fitzwarine as a young, high-spirited youth, generous and kind-hearted, I believe, and a good son—but of a haughty and imperious disposition, which would occasion a young wife much misery, were he guilty of such imprudence as to think of marrying at so early an age, without any profession, and, as I hear, entirely dependent on his mother. I must, however, admit, from the inquiries I have made, that he is a young man of sound religious principles, and of excellent character ; and his handsome person renders him very prepossessing ; but I trust, for your own peace of mind and future comfort, you will not accept any man, however good-looking and agreeable, until you

have had an opportunity of judging, by at least twelve months' acquaintance, his true character; and, above all other considerations, remember, that a man without genuine Christian feelings, which will be known by his words and actions, is like a ship at sea, tossed to and fro by every rough breeze that arises."

"Indeed, Henry," replied Florence, "I have never yet entertained a serious thought of marrying; and although neither Mr. Medwyn nor Sir Everard Hilston are persons I am likely to be much taken with, most probably they have never entertained any intentions of the kind towards me,—at least I hope not."

"But what of Fitzwarine, Florence? Your tell-tale colour induces me to believe you think differently of him."

"And have I not good cause, dear Henry, to think well of one who risked his own life to save mine?"

"Yes, dear girl, to think well of him, certainly; but recollect that act was only the natural impulse of a young and daring spirit

who would have taken the same leap to save a favourite dog from drowning."

" Still, Henry, it would have been a noble and courageous deed."

" A thoughtless and impetuous one, my dear Florence ; and it is against this very rash impetuosity of disposition I would caution you. You must not substitute love in the place of gratitude."

" Indeed, Henry, I have no intention to do so, although most grateful I shall always feel towards him."

" Well, my dear girl, to that there can be no reasonable objection, only do not think it necessary to fall in love with him, merely because he dragged you from the moat ; and now, having given you a tolerably long lecture on these matters, which, as I may never have an opportunity of again alluding to them, I thought it my duty to do, we must terminate our last ramble together ; and my fervent prayers will ever be offered up for you whilst life remains, that the Almighty may watch over and protect you from evil. May God bless and prosper you, my own dear Florence, and

grant that, if not permitted on earth, we may be united in heaven."

Florence was affected to tears by these last solemn words, and she struggled in vain to suppress her woman's feelings, which were overcome at the sad prospect of parting thus, perhaps for ever, with one she had loved from childhood as an only brother ; and Major Sinclair saw, and knew from his knowledge of womankind, that this was his hour of triumph, of which few, very few, would have possessed the moral courage to resist the temptation to avail themselves. Had Sinclair at this moment confessed his long-devoted love, and the agony he felt at their separation, the fate of Florence had been sealed as his wife for ever.

From my own observation of women, their hearts are always deeply affected at witnessing distress of mind in others, particularly those of whom they entertain a good opinion ; and although Florence had never yet experienced the feeling we call love, yet there dwelt within her bosom a strong and warm affection for her cousin, which she might have mistaken for it, and Sinclair would not have pleaded in

vain. The confession was almost hovering on his lips, at beholding her deep emotion, notwithstanding his previous resolutions, when the sharp crack of a rifle startled Florence, and the next moment a fine buck bounded across the drive, within a few yards of their feet, closely pursued by two powerful deer-hounds.

“Oh, Henry!” she exclaimed, her thoughts being instantly diverted into a new channel, “can nothing be done to save that poor creature’s life? Oh, do stop those savage dogs!”

“There stands their owner,” he replied, as Hugh Fitzwarine suddenly appeared before them.

“Oh, pray, Mr. Fitzwarine,” she immediately said, “do not suffer your dogs to kill that poor deer!”

“Your wishes shall be complied with, Miss Seaton,” he replied, and instantly the shrill notes of his whistle were heard piercing through the wood. All was still for a few moments, when the baying of the dogs was heard in the upper drive, leading towards

Forest Lodge. Hugh's voice was then raised with a caution to his dogs, intelligible to none but them, and he added, "Now, Miss Seaton, the deer is safe, and you shall restore him to liberty."

"You missed your victim, then," remarked the Major, with an ill-suppressed air of exultation.

"Barely, Major Sinclair," replied Hugh, "as this horn struck from his head will testify; but as Miss Seaton takes an interest in his life, I am rejoiced to say the deer has received no greater injury."

"Except his haunches being torn to pieces by your dogs, I suppose, sir, before we reach the spot."

"My life for his, Major Sinclair, that after my signal not a hair of him will be found displaced."

"Come, then, Florence," said the Major, "let us witness this wonderful performance."

When they approached the spot, the deer was standing with his back to the wood, and the two hounds in close attendance on either side.

“Now, Major Sinclair,” inquired Hugh, “have I deceived Miss Seaton? or if you still doubt my word, the dogs shall hold him by the ears till you examine him yourself.”

“Oh, pray don’t let them hurt him again,” interposed Florence.

On which Hugh, calling them by name to come away, the dogs immediately returned to their master, who, patting their heads, commended them for their ready obedience, whilst the deer bounded quickly off, and disappeared from view.

Florence, relieved from apprehension, could not forbear expressing her delight at the deer’s escape, and her admiration of the two noble-looking hounds, which appeared now so gentle, licking their master’s hand; but the Major saying it was now getting late, hurried her away, and Hugh, raising his hat, without making another observation, wished her good evening. On the following day Major Sinclair bid adieu to the inmates of Forest Lodge.

CHAPTER XII.

THE twelfth of August, the opening day for sportsmen on the Moors, was now at hand, and the previous afternoon Hugh Fitzwarine rode over to Forest Lodge to invite the Admiral to join him in his sport. On being ushered into the drawing-room, he found Florence seated at the piano, with Sir Everard Hilston accompanying her in a duet. Hugh stood irresolute whether to proceed further or not, his dark eye resting for a moment, flashing fire, on his apparently favoured rival, who, unaware of his presence, was, on the termination of a verse in the song, bending over her to turn the leaf of the music-book, and whisper-

ing some soft flattery in her ear, which caused the colour to rise to the face of Florence. At that moment, on turning her head, her eye rested on the erect form of Hugh Fitzwarine. Springing from her seat, the crimson hue now spreading to her very forehead, she advanced quickly to meet him with outstretched hand, which Hugh accepting, said—

“ I fear, Miss Seaton, I am a most unwelcome intruder; pray continue your song with Sir Everard Hilston, as my visit was chiefly intended for the Admiral, and I can call again, or by letter explain the object of my visit.”

“ Indeed, Mr. Fitzwarine,” she replied, “ your visit is by no means an intrusion; and as mamma and the Admiral are only gone out for a short drive in the pony-carriage, I hope you will await their return, the Admiral being particularly anxious to see you.”

“ Only a little interruption to our pretty duet, Fitzwarine,” added Hilston, “ which Miss Seaton and myself can practise another day,—just a pleasure deferred, that is all; but I conclude music is not much in *your* way.”

“ And what foundation, sir, have you for drawing such a conclusion ? ” asked Hugh, impatiently, his temper being roused by Sir Everard’s implied familiarity with Miss Seaton.

“ Why, Fitzwarine, without intending offence, I did not think you had opportunities of listening to any but the music of the hounds.”

“ Which have more musical notes,” retorted Hugh, “ than any of Sir Everard Hilston’s.”

“ Very likely, sir,” replied Hilston ; “ but such altercations are not quite the thing in the presence of ladies ; and now, Miss Seaton,” offering his hand, which she did not appear to notice, “ I must wish you good morning, and I will do myself the honour of calling again on Friday, with the new piece of music I promised you, when I hope we shall have no unpleasant interruptions to our singing.”

“ I must beg to decline your offer, Sir Everard, of the music, as I have before told you I had more than sufficient already to last me for some months, and on Friday I shall not

be at home." With a look of much annoyance, the Baronet made a low bow, and withdrew ; and as the door closed, Hugh, again approaching, said—

" Can you forgive me, Miss Seaton, for my rudeness in your presence, which, believe me, I now deeply deplore ; but this is the second time that Sir Everard Hilston has endeavoured to make me appear contemptible in your sight, which is hard to endure. Forgive me this once," he continued, extending his hand, " and if I should again have the misfortune of meeting him at Forest Lodge, which probably I never shall, no taunts of his shall ever induce me to treat him otherwise than with silent contempt. As Mrs. Seaton's approved visitor, at her house, I ought to have had more forbearance, particularly before you, to whom it is evident his attentions are principally directed."

" Indeed, Mr. Fitzwarine," replied Florence, accepting his hand, " I fully acquit you of any intentional rudeness to myself, and regret extremely the difference which has arisen between yourself and Sir Everard, who, being

rather a favourite with mamma, you may probably often meet here."

"Of that, for the future, there is little prospect."

"And why not, Mr. Fitzwarine?" she timidly enquired.

"I might probably be the unwelcome cause of interrupting another little duet," he replied, very gravely, "or, perhaps, a more agreeable *tête-à-tête* with Sir Everard Hilston."

"I was not aware," she said, in an offended tone, "that Sir Everard had called till he was ushered into the room, where he found me at the piano, or I should not have received him alone in mamma's absence; and you must have gathered from my last words, that it is not probable I shall again be engaged in another duet with him."

"Well, then, Miss Seaton, will you let me convince you that I know other music than that of the hounds, if you will be kind enough to play the accompaniment."

"Oh! certainly," she said, with a laugh and look of surprise, as she approached the

instrument—when, turning over some songs, he selected the following :—

“ I ask thee not to think of me
Amongst the gay and light ;
I bid thee not remember me,
When all around is bright ;
But, should some song of other days,
That I have sung to thee,
Come o’er thine ear with sudden strains,
Oh ! then remember me.

“ When hope is beaming o’er thy brow,
And friends around thee press,
I would not that one thought of me
Should mar thy happiness ;
But if this bleak and wintry world
Should shed its blight o’er thee,
And trusting friends grow strange and cold,
Then, then remember me.

“ Farewell ! we may not meet again
As we so oft have met.
Thou leav’st me, and each passing scene
Shall teach thee to forget ;
But I, through life unchanged, unmoved,
Shall still be true to thee ;
And, when thou think’st of hours long past,
Oh ! then remember me.”

Hugh possessed a fine, rich, full voice, and he sang with such pathos the last verse, that

the tears stood in the eyes of Florence, and her emotion was so great, she struggled in vain to suppress it.

“Oh! Mr. Fitzwarine,” she at last exclaimed, “how could you so long have hidden from us the delightful talent you possess? and how pleased mamma will be to find you have such a splendid voice!”

“That you are pleased with it,” he said, and his words faltered, “is my greatest reward;—and now, God bless you, Florence!—farewell!” he added, abruptly, offering his hand.

“Oh! do not go yet,” she said, as her hand still lingered in his, and an unbidden tear stole down her cheek. It was the first time the name of Florence had escaped his lips; and a feeling she had never before experienced passed like an electric shock through her heart, while her frame trembled with an agitation she could not conceal. “Oh! do not go yet,” she repeated, whilst her eyes were timidly raised to his. “Why did you say farewell so mournfully, as if we should never meet again?”

“It were better, far better for me, my dear

Miss Seaton," he replied, still more sadly, "that we should never meet again."

At this moment the carriage was driven up to the door, and Florence hastily escaped to her own room. Hugh had scarcely time to collect his scattered senses, ere Mrs. Seaton and the Admiral made their appearance; and on shaking hands with them, the Admiral exclaimed, "Ah! my boy, how glad I am to see you again! I began to think you had forgotten us all; and now, I hope, Mrs. Seaton will insist on your dining here, as I have many little matters to talk over." Mrs. Seaton also pressing him to remain, he could not resist the temptation of spending a few more hours in the society of one to whom he had so nearly confessed his love, and whose image had never been effaced from his mind since her fearful plunge into the moat.

"Then you will allow me, Mrs. Seaton," he replied, "to ride home first and apprise my mother of your kind invitation, which it will afford me the greatest pleasure to accept."

"Then be off directly, Hugh," cried the Admiral, "and return as quickly as possible,

as you have not a moment to spare ; and remember, I don't like cold soup or overdone fish."

Hugh lingered not another instant ; and Florence did not appear until dressed for dinner, when the Admiral rallied her, good-humouredly, on her being at home to two young gentlemen during their absence.

"Indeed, Admiral," she replied, "I was taken so by surprise at their unexpected entrance, I could not run away."

"Very disagreeable company, I dare say, my dear. I suppose you will be sorry to hear that your mother has prevailed on Hugh Fitzwarine to return and dine with us this evening."

At this announcement the tell-tale colour rose to her cheek ; but her sparkling eye and sunny smile revealed the pleasure she felt in the prospect of meeting him so soon again. Mrs. Seaton entering the room prevented the Admiral making further remarks ; and as the clock struck six, Hugh's step was heard in the hall.

"Just in time, my boy," cried the Admiral,

as he again shook his young friend warmly by the hand ; “ and now, not to spoil your appetite, I shall reserve a little lecture I have in store for you until after dinner.”

“ Not a very severe one, I hope, Admiral, or I must enlist the ladies on my side.”

“ They will be dead against you also, Hugh, so you had better trust to my clemency.”

“ Most willingly, sir, will I place myself in your hands. But I hope Mrs. Bowen is well, as I do not see her this evening.”

“ Gone for a dish of catlap and gossip with old Mrs. Northington to-night ; so we are just two and two ;—and here comes old Donald to announce dinner.”

Florence, of course, fell to Hugh’s care ; and as he advanced to offer his arm, she thought he had never appeared so handsome before ; in fact, dispelling all gloomy anticipations, his spirits had been wonderfully raised by Miss Seaton’s ill-concealed emotion that afternoon, which led him to believe she felt a deeper interest in him than she had ever before shown.

Oh ! with what proud, ecstatic delight did

Hugh Fitzwarine press to his side, nearest his heart, the beautifully-rounded, snow-white arm of Florence Seaton, which he now hoped might one day be his own ! And as her eyes met his, the beaming, happy look she encountered there, with the convulsive pressure on her arm, revealed at once the secret of his heart. She knew and felt then that Fitzwarine loved her ; and a joyous, tumultuous feeling of inexpressible pleasure passed through her own bosom at this realization of her fondest hopes.

The Admiral could not forbear remarking on Hugh's unusual flow of spirits during dinner :—

“ Why, Hugh, you have completely thrown aside the monk's cowl, with your rosy cheeks and cheerful conversation.”

“ Exposure to the air, Admiral, always gives me a heightened colour ; and you ought not to be surprised at my feeling in spirits, in such delightful society.”

“ Oh, no, certainly not—when sitting by the side of my charming pet, whose presence

throws a halo of cheerfulness on all who approach her."

"I think, Admiral," replied Florence, gaily, "I shall punish you for this flattery, by refusing to sing or play for you this evening."

After the ladies had retired, the Admiral began lecturing Hugh on absenting himself so long from Forest Lodge, adding:—

"That coxcomb Hilston is now continually here, for whom I entertain the most thorough contempt; and I am sorry to say"—(in a low tone)—"Mrs. Seaton appears to encourage his attentions to her daughter, who is, of course, the object he has in view. I hope, therefore, my dear boy, you will favour us with your society rather more frequently than of late, to check-mate this conceited pretender to the hand of my darling girl, who deserves a better fate."

"My dear sir," replied Hugh, "I have no pretensions to compete with Sir Everard Hilston, who, independent of his title, is reported to be the possessor of large landed estates, and, therefore, a most desirable connection in a worldly point of view; although, from my

own knowledge, a detestable character—false-hearted, fickle in his attachments, selfish, and imperious in disposition, and without morality or religion.”

“ Then, my dear Hugh, there is an imperative necessity for your assisting me to prevent Florence falling into the hands of such a brute; for I am quite satisfied that your influence with her is far greater than his.”

“ I would do anything in my power, Admiral, to save Miss Seaton from such a fate; but you must bear in mind my dependent position on my dear mother; although I am happy to tell you that, since we last met, I have succeeded to a small property, which will enable me for the future to keep a pony-carriage for her, and give her some additional comforts; yet withal my means are very limited in comparison with Hilston’s large fortune, which enables him to make a splendid settlement on a wife; and that, my dear Admiral, you must admit, is generally with mammas of paramount importance.”

“ Even so;—it is, alas! too true; and my dear Pet, I fear, will be sacrificed at the shrine

of Mammon ; yet let us endeavour to ward off the blow, at least for a time ; and God grant that another windfall may soon come to you ! —at any rate, promise me to call here oftener than you have done of late.”

“ Most willingly would I oblige you in anything, my dear Admiral ; but knowing now Mrs. Seaton’s intentions, I would not take advantage of her kind hospitality to supplant Sir Everard in her daughter’s affections, even if I could.”

“ Daughter’s affections, indeed ! I’ll answer for Florence not being, or likely to be, in love with such a puppy ; and, if I can read a woman’s thoughts by her eyes, she thinks far more deeply of Hugh Fitzwarine.”

“ Then, Admiral, I must for the future use more discretion ; for it might be very dangerous to her happiness, and fatal to mine through life, seeing her too often—as I must not at present think of marrying.”

“ Don’t make a fool of yourself, Hugh !” exclaimed the Admiral, impatiently. “ You have room enough at the Abbey for a seraglio of women, and fortune sufficient to sup-

port one, at least, in comfort during your mother's lifetime; and a daughter-in-law such as Florence, would, I am sure, add immensely to the comfort of her declining years. So no more of your fine-spun, ridiculous ideas, which put me quite out of temper. Now let us join the ladies."

"Will you join me, Admiral, then, on the 12th, and help to kill some grouse?"

"No, Hugh—I cannot leave on that day, as that confounded cur, Hilston, is asked to come over and dine here,—and I'll cheek him, if you won't; but, on the following day, I will with pleasure accompany you to your moors."

On entering the drawing-room, Florence was playing a pretty air, which ceased on the gentlemen's appearance."

"Pray go on, my Pet!" cried the Admiral, "as Hugh has put me out of temper; and your sweet strains, like those of David, will allay the evil spirit now resting on Saul. Or stay,—sing me a cheerful song instead. By-the-bye, I wonder, Master Hugh, if you can warble a strain. You look like a

fellow who could sing if he would, and I'll wager a crown have a better voice than that cracked one of Hilston's. Florence, will you ask him to tip us a stave? he can't refuse you as he would me; and you can play the music for him."

"Well, Admiral," exclaimed Hugh,—"*seniores priores*—so if you will begin, I will follow."

"Agreed, my lad;—so here goes," as he shouted out—

"At the siege of Belle-isle
I was there all the while,
I was there all the while
At the siege of Belle-isle."

—which he continued repeating with a stentorian voice, almost deafening his hearers, till Mrs. Seaton begged him to desist.

"Very well, my dear madam—most happy to obey orders; and I feel convinced you will not wish to hear my sweet tones again; but now, Hugh, clear your pipes."

On going to the instrument with Florence, he whispered, as she sat down,—

“Would you like to hear again the same I sang this morning?”

“No,” she replied, blushing deeply—“anything but that.”

“Then shall it be, ‘Of what is the old man thinking?’”

“Yes,” she replied, “that will just suit the Admiral.”

As Hugh’s melodious, well-modulated voice struck for the first time the ear of Mrs. Seaton, she turned in amazement to gaze upon its owner, as if her senses had been arrested by some extraordinary phenomenon. As he proceeded in his song, she sank back in her chair, with her finger on her lips, in token of silence to the Admiral, who, however, heeded it not, as he stood riveted to the position he had taken near the piano, the tears glistening in his eyes alone expressing his emotion.

When Hugh’s last notes died away, the Admiral seized his hand, exclaiming—

“Thank you, my dear lad; and, in answer to your appeal, I can only say that ‘the old man is always thinking of that dear boy,

Hugh Fitzwarine,' in whom he finds every day some new qualification to admire."

"My dear kind friend," replied Hugh, "your partiality invests me with higher qualities than I possess."

"No, no, my lad ; but now, Florence dear, play some lively air to raise my spirits ;" which she immediately complied with, as the Admiral returned to Mrs. Seaton, between whom expressions of delight passed on discovering Hugh's latent talent. Tea was then introduced, the piano closed, and Hugh engaged in a *tête-à-tête* with Florence, whilst looking over with her a large book of prints, which lay on the table at which they were sitting. What passed between them there it is not necessary now to divulge ; it may suffice to say that Hugh was not aware of the lapse of time, until the little clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour of eleven, when he whispered—

"I must now wish you good-night, dear Florence, thanking you for the happiest day I have ever spent."

“Then we shall see you again, soon?” she asked, in a soft, enquiring tone.

He hesitated for a moment, when a sudden change in her countenance forced him to reply cheerfully—

“You will have much to answer for—but come sometimes I must.—Now, God bless you,—good-night,” as he held her hand for a moment; then rising to make his adieux to Mrs. Seaton and the Admiral, he left the room. When he was gone, the Admiral said—

“Well, my dear madam, what think you now of the young Abbot?”

“He improves greatly on nearer acquaintance,” was the reply; “still we must not forget” (with a meaning look at her daughter) “that, whilst his mother lives, he cannot think of marrying, poor fellow; and even at her decease, his means will still be very slender to support a wife.”

“Tut—tut! my dear madam. Hugh Fitzwarine is not the poor fellow you take him to be; the rental of the Abbey estate has always exceeded a thousand a year; and your neighbour, Farmer Robertson, says it will be

nearly doubled in value in a very short time, by Mr. Fitzwarine's judicious management."

"Well, Admiral, that may be the case; but a pretty, well-educated, accomplished girl, of good family, has a right to expect half that sum nearly, to be settled upon her as pin-money."

"Some young ladies have very unreasonable expectations," replied the Admiral; "but of course every right-thinking, honourable man would wish to make a good settlement on his wife; and this, as the property will be solely his own on his mother's decease, Fitzwarine has in his power to do, whenever he may marry—although I have never yet heard him allude to matrimony."

"I am rather surprised, however," added Mrs. Seaton, "that if his income amounts to the sum you mention, he has not kept a pony carriage at least for his mother."

"A large outlay has been made for these last three years, at his mother's particular desire, in draining and other farm operations; but he told me this evening, that having just succeeded to more property, through a distant

relation of his father's, he should now insist on keeping a carriage for Mrs. Fitzwarine, and giving her some additional comforts."

"I'm glad to hear of his good fortune, Admiral—and now I think it is time to say 'good night.' "

On being left alone, the Admiral sat musing in his arm-chair for some minutes. "Ah!" he muttered at last, "I see how the cat jumps! That sallow-faced Baronet is the mother's man, but Hugh is the daughter's, or my eyes deceive me. Steady, however,—we must drop anchor, or my ship will be drifted aground—shorten sail, sir, during this gale of wind which I see looming in the distance!" then, seizing his candle, he hurried from the room.

We will not disclose the thoughts of Florence, when she laid her head on her pillow; but the impression made that day, by Hugh's conduct, was never obliterated from her heart, and she now experienced a far different feeling towards him from that she had so long entertained for her cousin.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON the morning of the twelfth of August, Hugh breakfasted by candle-light, and setting out early for the Moors, five brace of grouse fell quickly to his gun, which were despatched immediately by a trusty messenger to Forest Lodge ; and old Donald, having laid them out on a tray, carried them into the drawing-room, where the party were assembled.

“ Mr. Fitzwarine’s compliments, my lady, and has sent you some grouse.”

All rose to see the birds, but Mrs. Seaton appeared rather disinclined to accept so large a present.

“ Well, my dear madam,” said the Admiral,

“ five brace are nothing very extraordinary, and I think the lad will have to supply me with a larger number the day after to-morrow, as I want some to send to my friends.”

“ Then pray take some of these, Admiral.”

“ No, no,” he replied, “ charity begins at home, and I am uncommonly fond of grouse myself, so off with them, Donald, and hang them up by the neck in some cool place, and a brace might do for dinner, if Mrs. Seaton has no objection ;” to which an assent being given, Donald withdrew.

Hugh, having provisions with him, rested for two hours during the heat of the day, and having met with good sport in the afternoon, the evening shadows were spreading over the earth, when Hugh and his keeper had reached the spot just opposite the bungalow of the Recluse Macgregor. At that moment a piercing shriek smote their ears from the dwelling. They stopped instantly, startled by the cry. It was again repeated. “ Quick !” cried Hugh to his attendant, “ let us jump this brook, or the old man may be murdered.”

“Stay, sir,” said the keeper, as they were hastily approaching the house, “I see a figure standing at the front door ; let us go round the corner, and take him by surprise.” As both rushed round with guns in hand, the man retreated inside the house, and was trying to fasten the door, which the powerful frame of the athletic Scotchman prevented, who, making a desperate effort, fell, as it gave way, into the passage. At that instant a pistol was fired by the robber, who rushed forward to warn his comrades ; close at his heels followed Hugh, and so closely, that he struck him headlong into the bedroom of Macgregor, who lay on the floor struggling with two other men, his long white hair crimsoned with blood from a ghastly cut across his forehead.

“Villains !” cried Hugh, cocking his gun, “your doom is sealed if you offer more violence. Let go your victim.”

“Never !” cried one who was kneeling on Macgregor, “till I’ve had his life’s blood.”

He was instantly struck senseless by the butt end of Hugh’s gun. Macgregor, by a

last effort, at the same moment staggered to his legs, with fury grappling his other assailant, whom he soon overpowered, and the stalwart keeper, rushing in, felled the third (who had again risen) with his huge fist, as if he had been struck down by a pole-axe. The man struck down by Hugh, being stunned, lay still on the floor, and Macpherson stooping down, now strapped his late opponent's arms tightly behind his back, whilst Hugh was assisting Macgregor to pinion the other. All had passed so quickly, that Hugh had not time to address one word to the Recluse till now, when he said, "I fear, sir, you are sadly wounded by these ruffians, from the blood on your head and face. Let me offer my assistance in washing and dressing your wounds."

"I would know first the name of him to whom I am indebted for my life," replied Macgregor.

"Hugh Fitzwarine, of Stanmore Abbey," was the reply.

"Then, Mr. Hugh Fitzwarine, if you will permit your servant to assist in conveying

these scoundrels to the nearest gaol, and call on me to-morrow morning, I shall be much obliged ; my own servant, who has been tied and bound in the next room, can dress my wounds. Good night."

Fortunately for Hugh, two shepherds were passing by that way, who, attracted by the report of fire-arms in the dwelling of the Recluse, made their way to the scene of strife, and with their assistance Macpherson was enabled to remove the robbers and take them to the nearest village, where they were handed over to the care of the constables, Hugh returning home, where he related his adventures to his mother, and the extraordinary conduct of Macgregor.

On the following morning, about twelve, he paid his visit to the Bungalow, where, at the entrance-door, stood Macgregor in his dressing-gown and slippers. Hugh sprang from his horse, and approaching, offered his hand, when the Recluse, drawing himself haughtily up to his full height, exclaimed, "That letter, sir," offering him one, "contains a thousand pounds, for which those villains would have

taken my life last night. It is yours now—take it—you are poor, and want it."

"Who told you I was so poor and contemptible a being," demanded Hugh, his eye flashing fire, "as to receive a recompense for doing a simple act of duty to a fellow-creature in distress?"

"I knew your father well, Hugh Fitzwarine, and would render some service to his son, for the kindness *he* once showed me."

"Then if you knew my father well, sir, you would not have offered such an insult to his son;" on which, turning away, Hugh sprang into his saddle.

"Stay," cried the Recluse, "I would not willingly offend a lad of high spirit like yourself, although I hate the whole human race besides. Now mark my words; I am your debtor for a few more years of life, perhaps, in this accursed world, where man is ever preying on his fellow-man. I have a mission to fulfil, if spared to do so. Now promise me, as your father's friend, and give me your hand as a pledge of your word, that you will accept my assistance, as I have done yours,

whenever you may be in distress, no matter of what kind, whether in affairs of the world, of honour, or of love,—for you love *one*, Hugh Fitzwarine, whose hand will be refused you, yet that hand it is in my power to give."

Hugh stood in amazement at this extraordinary revelation of his secret by a stranger, his heightened colour betraying his inward thoughts, when the Recluse, grasping his hand, exclaimed, "There is my pledge; even at the foot of the altar will I redeem it. Farewell." And instantly turning to the door, he disappeared.

Hugh pondered long and deeply on these parting words of the Recluse, strange and incomprehensible as they appeared to him. How could he know his love for Florence, which he himself scarcely yet knew? What power could he possess over her? How could he tell he would be refused her hand before he himself had thought of asking for it? And this man, unknown to all, secluded from the world, appeared to know even the secret thoughts of those living around him. "Yet stay," muttered Hugh, "I will go back and

test the truth of his assertion ;" and turning his horse's head, there stood Macgregor, as before, awaiting his return.

" I would ask you one question more, sir," said Hugh ; " the name of her you say I love ?"

" Florence Seaton," he replied. " Hah ! hah ! hah !" and his unearthly, wild laughter rang in Hugh's ears as he galloped fast away, as if from the presence of one linked with the power of demons. That horrid laugh haunted him day and night, he could not dispel it from his mind ; it sat as a nightmare on his breast ; it was his dream at night, and he awoke with the words still ringing in his ears, " Florence Seaton—hah ! hah ! hah !"

Hugh resolved to know more of this extraordinary being ; and a few days after his return from shooting on the Moors, called again on the Recluse, whom he found in his dressing gown and slippers, occupied in the garden before his house.

" Will you do me the favour, sir," said Hugh, " of accepting some grouse ?"

" No," replied Macgregor, in a sharp voice ;

“I accept no favours from any man, least of all from you. I am your debtor.”

“Not so,” replied Hugh, “you owe me nothing. I was the agent of Providence; your obligations are due to God, not to me.”

“So young and a hypocrite!” replied the Recluse, with a sneer.

“No, sir, I am no hypocrite,” said Hugh, haughtily.

“You are, Hugh Fitzwarine; you come here with a present in your hand to know more of me, and my influence over Florence Seaton.”

Hugh stood abashed—it was the truth. The Recluse added, “Seek not to know more of me, young man, I would be alone. The time will come when I shall have it in my power to do you a service, of which you wot little now—but heed my warning—dare to pry into my secret power, or even mention my name and what has passed between us to mortal ears, even to Florence Seaton or your own mother, and your punishment, with my curse, shall follow you. Begone!”

Hugh quailed before the fierce expression

of the old man's eye, as he uttered these words, in an authoritative voice, and raising his hat, said, "You shall be obeyed, sir," and left the place. From that hour the name of the *Recluse* never passed his lips.

A month had now passed since his first meeting with Macgregor, during which he had called four or five times at Forest Lodge, but only once had he been invited to dine there by Mrs. Seaton, whose manner to him had become quite changed. Hugh felt this change, so did the Admiral, who explained it to him the last time they met there at dinner.

"My suspicions are verified, my dear boy ; that fellow Hilston has been here generally two or three times a week, calling at luncheon-time, and remaining until nearly our dinner-hour, when, of course, he is asked to dine. After luncheon he remains in the drawing-room, singing duets with Florence, to which he has every encouragement from Mrs. Seaton, who, taking her work, sits listening to his cracked voice as if he were a seraph—sometimes leaving them, however, alone, under

pretence of attending to her household duties."

"But what of Miss Seaton, Admiral?"

"She evidently dislikes the man, and told her mother a fortnight ago she would not practise any more with Sir Everard, as he sang so false. 'Indeed, my dear!' replied her mother, 'I do not detect any fault in his voice; and you know my love for music.' 'But, mamma,' pleaded Florence, 'it makes my head ache playing and singing the whole afternoon, when I used to have my walk or ride with the Admiral; so that I hope you will excuse me until after dinner.' Mrs. Seaton, fearing to press the matter against her daughter's inclination, who might probably take a dislike to the baronet, prudently gave way. So now we have our walk or ride as usual, whether he is here or not; and I take precious good care to check-mate the fellow at every move he makes. Florence and I understand each other well; and she has told me in confidence her dislike to Hilston. We talk of our pets sometimes, she of the puppy you gave me, now transferred to her,

which she kisses often, for his master's sake, I suspect ; and I, of the young Abbot, to whose praises she is never tired of listening. When I first told her of your fight with the robbers, she turned as white as her pocket-handkerchief ; and when I spoke of the brave conduct of my boy, the tears stood in her eyes. Yes, Hugh, the heart of that dear girl is yours ; God grant her hand may never be given to another man ! But a struggle is coming, I see,—if this baronet proposes, which I fear he will—between her duty to her mother, whom she loves so dearly, and her duty to herself. In such a case as this, Hugh, I must be your adviser. Florence must know you love her. It is that knowledge only which can prevent her yielding to her mother's entreaties at once ; and being in heart and simplicity quite a child, ever ready to yield implicit obedience to her mother's wishes, without any knowledge of the world or the wickedness of mankind, she would at once comply with her desire, and marry Hilston ; for the fact is, there is nothing personally objectionable to the man himself, as far as

appearances go ; he is tolerably good-looking, with gentlemanly manners, and decidedly what is called a lady's man—a character I detest, with all those soft-sawder speeches and little finicking attentions. To thousands of young girls, especially those who have never felt what love is, marriage appears in the light of a civil contract only. It is dinned into their ears when children by nurses, and repeated afterwards by ladies' maids. ‘La ! Miss, what a fine lady you will be one of these days, when you are married to some grand gentleman, with plenty of money !—and then you'll have your carriages and horses, men-servants and women-servants, with jewels, and diamonds, and pearls, all so beautiful ! Oh ! what a thing it is to be a lady !’ Then the mamma takes up the strain, by talking of her playing, and singing, and other accomplishments, and finishes by saying, ‘I should not be surprised, my love, to see you a countess, when you come out in the world.’ So that many girls—alas ! how many—are instructed to look upon a good marriage as the sole aim of their

existence, for which purpose, and none other, they have been brought into this world. Love is *pooh-poohed* as a childish idea, and it is not till they are linked to a man they can neither respect nor admire, that those galling chains are really felt, which can be severed only by the hand of death. And then the horror of meeting afterwards with one they could and would love if they dare ! My dear Hugh, from such a fate I would save Florence Seaton,—for her loving, affectionate heart would break if joined to one she could not cling to with that same fondness and tenderness, inseparable from her gentle, confiding nature, she now feels for her mother.”

“ And yet, Admiral,” replied Hugh, in a sad tone, “ who can prevent it ? ”

“ *You* may, Hugh Fitzwarine ; no one else can ; for I feel assured she loves you already. Confess your love, and this bitter fate may be averted.”

“ Or,” added Hugh, “ a much more bitter fate encountered. Not knowing my love, she might be happy with Hilston ; but the knowledge of it might make her miserable for life ;

for I cannot interfere between her mother and herself,—the attempt would be fruitless, as Hilston is the favoured man. Moreover, there is no comparison between him, with his title and great wealth, and myself; everything is in train for him; I should be rejected. Pride and honour alike forbid the attempt, my dear Admiral. I dare not see her again, or my resolution would fail. Pray do not renew the subject. Let us now join the ladies. Oh, that we had never met!" cried Hugh, as, rising, he paced the room in agony.

"Come, my dear boy," said the Admiral, putting his hand on Hugh's shoulder, "don't give way thus; all may yet be well. But will you meet me to-morrow, at two o'clock, by the deer's leap, in the glen?"

"Yes, Admiral, most willingly. Now, then, let us go."

That evening, Hugh could not be prevailed on to sing more than once, when his voice faltered so that Mrs. Seaton could not forbear noticing it. Florence felt alarmed; she scarcely knew why.

"You are, I fear, ill," she said, in a low tone.

“Oh, Florence!” he whispered, as he stooped, apparently to look over the last leaf of the song, “my heart is out of tune, as well as my voice. We may not meet again!”

“Why not?” she asked, looking inquiringly in his face.

“Play that piece of music before you, and I will say more.”

On Florence running her fingers over the piano in a loud key, Hugh added,—

“Mrs. Seaton disapproves my visits; she may, perhaps, never ask me to dine here again.”

“No, no,” she replied, “you must be mistaken!”

“I fear not,” was the low response. “Sir Everard is the favoured person; Hugh Fitzwarine must be forgotten.”

“Never!” she said, raising her tearful eyes to his—“never by me!”

“A thousand thanks,” he whispered, “for that kind admission. It is hazardous now for me to say more.”

Soon afterwards, Hugh, pleading indisposition, said he must return home; and having

wished Mrs. Seaton and the Admiral good-night, he pressed the hand of Florence warmly in his own, and felt that pressure was returned, the eyes of both betraying their inward emotions.

On the day following, Hugh, punctual to his appointment, rode to the glen, thinking to find the Admiral alone; but, on rounding the corner of the hill, he came suddenly upon him and Florence, riding leisurely side by side along the drive.

“Hah, Hugh!” exclaimed the Admiral, in apparent surprise, “are you going to ride over us in your fiery course? Where now?”

“Not further than the village before us,” he replied.

“Then suit your pace to ours, for we are riding in the same direction.”

“Most willingly,” was the reply, as he rode up to shake Florence by the hand, adding, “this is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure, meeting you so soon again.”

The glen they were now entering was one of the most lovely and romantic spots in England, more strikingly so to strangers,

from being surrounded on three sides by barren, heath-clad moors, extending for several miles south-east and west, the village lying at its termination on the north, in a deep valley, through which flowed a rapid mountain-torrent, taking its rise at the head of the ravine, where also the trackway commenced running parallel with the stream for nearly two miles, down to the verge of the village. Both banks of this glen were thickly covered with stunted oak trees, save at certain intervals, where the bare rock jutted out, through which the road had been cut so narrow at some points, that a single horseman could barely pass with safety from the overhanging cliff above his head, and the precipitous descent below, down which, should his horse miss his footing, the rider must have been dashed, to his almost certain destruction, there being a declivity of nearly two hundred feet to the bed of the river.

As love is said to laugh at locksmiths, so youth thinks lightly of danger; and Hugh, with Florence riding by his side, was too agreeably occupied in a very interesting col-

loquy to bestow much attention on the dangerous trackway through which they were descending, when a black-cock, rising from a patch of heather above their heads, startled Florence's pony, which, swerving suddenly round, his fore feet touching the very verge of the precipice, his mistress lost her seat, and was falling from her saddle into the yawning abyss, as Hugh, springing from his horse, caught the skirt of her habit, but finding the garment giving way, with great presence of mind he seized her foot in his other hand, and by placing his knee against a fallen piece of rock, succeeded in dragging her back from her fearful position.

It was the act of a moment, and the Admiral, leisurely riding at a respectful distance behind, did not know what had occurred until he saw Florence (who had fainted) reclining in Hugh's arms, and learnt from him the nature of the accident.

“God be praised,” he exclaimed, “that you were along side of her, my dear boy, instead of my old hulk, or we had both been dashed to pieces amongst those rocks below.”

Florence, who had been more frightened than hurt, soon revived, and as she struggled to rise, Hugh whispered—

“ Dearest Florence, you are in safety now ; do not disdain my support a little longer.”

“ Oh, do not think I disdain you,” she murmured, “ who have again saved me from destruction ; but I am quite recovered now.”

“ Do you feel hurt, my darling ?” enquired the Admiral, as she stood yet leaning on Hugh’s arm.

“ Oh no, Admiral, thank you, except a little bruised on my right shoulder.”

“ Thank God for his mercies, that you are restored to us again, my dear pet, without greater injuries ; and now, my dear boy, if you will place her in the saddle, we had better return home as soon as possible, but not a word must be said to Mrs. Seaton about what has happened, or she will never trust Florence with me again on horseback.”

Hugh having carefully lifted Florence on her saddle, walked by the side of her pony, holding him by the bridle, until they emerged from the glen out upon the open heath, which

they traversed at a slow pace until they reached the Forest Lodge grounds, where Hugh discontinued his escort, and returned home.

If any doubt had previously existed in the mind of Florence Seaton, as to Hugh's real feelings towards her, that doubt had now been dispelled by his impassioned expressions of thankfulness for her preservation, which, with reviving consciousness, fell upon her ear, when yet unable from faintness to raise herself from his arms. Florence knew now how deeply and fervently she was beloved by him, through whose intervention she had been a second time rescued from a violent death ; and cheered by this knowledge, she thought lightly of the bruises and fright she had sustained, although profoundly grateful to the Almighty for saving her life, and restoring her to a more happy state of existence.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE must now turn our attention to Mr. Croly Chaffman, the lawyer, nick-named by the lower orders *Oily Gammon*. This crafty practitioner had discovered that Mr. Seaton, independently of his own acquired wealth in the East, had lately succeeded to a large property in Yorkshire, by the death of an uncle, and that the next in succession was Miss Seaton. This information had been derived from Seaton's agent in London, and communicated to Chaffman as an old friend and schoolfellow, on the solemn assurance given by him, that it was to remain the most profound secret; and it particularly suited Chaff-

man's views to comply with his friend's injunctions by most carefully concealing the matter from every human being.

A new field for enterprise was now opened to this crafty lawyer, and a plan devised by which he hoped to secure the young lady and her future property. Being Mrs. Seaton's solicitor and confidential adviser in money matters, he recommended her selling out a sum of five thousand pounds in the funds, which were then very high, and placing it in the Heddington bank, where she would obtain five per cent. instead of three.

“Messrs Franklin and Son,” he observed, “are exceedingly wealthy, doing the business of half the county, and I assure you, my dear madam, are as safe as the Bank of England; moreover, I may tell you in confidence, that in addition to all my spare cash, I have a large amount of capital in their hands, for which they pay me good interest. But, my dear madam, this must remain entirely between ourselves.”

“Oh, of course,” replied Mrs. Seaton, “and if you feel perfectly satisfied with the safety

of the Heddington bank, the additional income would be particularly serviceable just now, when my daughter is coming out."

" You will excuse my freedom, my dear madam, as taking a natural and deep interest in all that concerns yourself, but report goes that Sir Everard Hilston is paying his addresses to Miss Florence."

" He calls here occasionally," Mrs. Seaton replied in a careless tone.

" I think, my dear madam, I ought to caution you, that Sir Everard is not a marrying man, and that, having duped two young ladies of good family already, his attentions ought to be received with suspicion."

Without regarding this information, Mrs. Seaton enquired if Mr. Chaffman had received any intelligence lately of her brother-in-law; to which he replied, that by his last advices from India, that gentleman was represented as having been married for some years, and was now living, with a large family of children, up in the Himalaya Mountains, " so that, my dear madam," added the crafty lawyer, " there is little prospect in that quarter."

Having thus deceived his unsuspecting client, Mr. Chaffman soon after took his leave, with the full intention of carrying out his preconcerted plans. Soon after his return to his Town house, the Honourable George Medwyn called upon him.

“ Well, Chaffman, how about old Seaton, of whom you were to make further enquiries ?”

“ Married, my dear sir, I am sorry to say, with half-a-dozen children, already ; kept it all very close—couldn’t hear of him for some time, but now he turns up with a lot of brats.”

“ D—d provoking, Chaffman, as I had gone on pretty far with the niece ; and I flatter myself (adjusting his locks before the glass) I had only to pop the question.”

“ Then pop the question to some other young lady, my dear sir. What say you to Miss Hamilton ? She has lots of money.”

“ What ! marry an idiot, Chaffman, and as ugly as sin into the bargain ?”

“ What does that signify, my dear sir ? You want the money, and must make the best of the bargain afterwards ; for between ourselves,

my dear sir, I have kept your sixty-per-cent. friends in London at bay, under the assurance that you were on the eve of marriage with a young lady of large possessions ; but if this fails, you will be at their mercy.”

“ Well, Chaffman, it will be a bitter pill to swallow ; but I will consider over the matter.”

“ Don’t be long considering,” replied the lawyer, as he opened the door for his client. “ There is no time to be lost. Good morning.”

The Admiral, having now overstayed his usual visit at Forest Lodge, reluctantly bade adieu to his friends, having exacted a promise from Hugh Fitzwarine to send him weekly dispatches of all that might occur. “ Keep up a stout heart, my dear boy,” on shaking hands with him for the last time, “ and save that poor girl from misery with a man she can never love or respect. No more, Hugh. It is now in your power to do so.” With which, brushing a tear from his furrowed cheek, he bade him farewell.

Relieved from the restraint imposed upon

him by the Admiral's presence, Sir Everard Hilston now became a more frequent visitor at Forest Lodge ; and the report soon became prevalent that he was an accepted suitor. Hugh had called twice since the Admiral's departure ; and on both occasions unluckily found his rival alone in the drawing-room with Florence ; and his triumphant looks so exasperated him, that he vowed secretly never to call there again.

“ Curses on that fellow's head ! ” muttered Hugh, as, giving way to passion, he galloped savagely away from the Lodge gate. “ His life's blood shall pay for his insolence to me this day ! ”

His thoughts had kept pace with the speed of his horse for about a mile to a steep ascent of the road between two hills, where he pulled him up into a walk, and began to think more calmly of his true position, when, his horse suddenly swerving at some object behind a furze bush, the tall form of the Recluse rose to its full height close to the way-side.

“ What now ! Hugh Fitzwarine,” he asked, “ with those dark, lowering looks ! Would

you murder that poor fool, Sir Everard Hilston?"

Surprised, conscience-smitten, and still angry, Hugh made no reply at first, when Macgregor quickly added :

"Shed no man's blood for Florence Seaton. She weds not without my consent, let that suffice you;" and turning round, he strode hastily away across the heather, without another word.

"Who can that strange man be," thought Hugh, "who holds such power over Florence Seaton? I might have asked her once that question; yet no—I dare not, or his curse descends upon me—and all believe him linked with Satan. Still," thought Hugh, "he may overrate his power; for it is now clear that Mrs. Seaton is resolved to accept this man for her daughter; and will Florence dare to disobey her mother? But my visits are intrusions now, and shall not be repeated, come what may. Oh! that I could recall these last two months—that I had never met Florence Seaton!"

From this day Hugh busily occupied him-

self with his country avocations, farming and shooting, although occasionally driving his mother out after luncheon, in the little carriage he had purchased for her, with two beautiful Scotch ponies ; but when Mrs. Fitzwarine proposed a visit to Forest Lodge, it was found he had always some very pressing business to attend to, so that she was obliged to call there alone ; and from his mother Florence learnt the true cause of his absence, although ignorant of it herself.

“ I cannot think,” Mrs. Fitzwarine remarked to her one day, when they were alone, “ what is the matter with my dear Hugh ; he is now so gloomy and absent ; never cheerful as he used to be ; his spirits are quite gone ; and yet he assures me he is not ill.”

At this relation of her son’s state Mrs. Fitzwarine noticed the tell-tale vermillion spread rapidly to the brow of Florence—the secret was revealed.

“ My dear child,” asked Mrs. Fitzwarine, “ has Hugh offended you or Mrs. Seaton, that he does not call here now as usual ?”

“ Oh ! indeed not,” she replied. “ We are

always so glad to see him, and have wondered at his long absence, unless he was annoyed at twice meeting Sir Everard Hilston here, whom I know he does not like."

"But, my dear Florence, I hear you are engaged to this Sir Everard."

"Oh! no, dear Mrs. Fitzwarine; this is not the case, I assure you, and never will be."

"Are you quite certain, my dear, it never will be? He is, I am told, very rich, good-looking, and a most desirable match."

"That may be true," replied Florence; "yet I do not like him, and never shall."

Mrs. Seaton entering the room at that moment, put a stop to further conversation on this subject. After dinner that evening, Mrs. Fitzwarine was in unusual good spirits, and her son could not forbear asking the cause.

"Come here, then, Hugh," she said, "and I will tell you a secret I have discovered to-day."

"Well, my dear mother, then what is this secret which has afforded you so much pleasure?"

“That Florence Seaton loves you as much as you love her. How blind I have been not to suspect this long before !”

She then related all that had passed between her and Florence that afternoon, and added, “Were I to choose one from all the world for a daughter, that one would be your own choice, my dear Hugh.”

“And yet, my dear mother, she never, I fear, may become mine, even did she love me as you think.”

“I am not deceived, Hugh, and feel quite sure now your happiness depends on yourself; so do not cast it away—resume your visits to Forest Lodge—and the hand of Florence Seaton, as her heart is, must be yours.”

“And yet,” he replied, “I cannot go there now for two good reasons: the first being that, were I to meet Hilston, I should quarrel with him under my present excited feelings; the second, that, should he be rejected—which I can scarcely believe, from Florence’s ever-ready compliance with her mother’s wishes—his dismissal would assuredly be assigned to

my intervention ; and, therefore, Mrs. Seaton would never welcome me again.”

“ Well, Hugh, perhaps you reason rightly ; and I suppose I must be your substitute. So now good night, my beloved boy, and may happier dreams await you !”

CHAPTER XV.

OTHER “*dramatis personæ*” now claim some notice at our hands. The village of Stanmore lay about a mile distant from the Abbey, consisting of one long street, on the high road to Heddington, with sundry cottages, some of a superior order, interspersed on either side the hills which overlooked the valley beneath, the Parsonage being the most conspicuous object on the south side, about a quarter of a mile from the village, where the Rev. Mr. Middleton, with his wife and two daughters, resided.

Mr. Middleton had now passed his fiftieth year, being a rather stout, portly personage,

of the middle height, his countenance expressive of good humour and benevolence, which were eminently conspicuous in his every-day life. Mrs. Middleton was somewhat his junior in years, her features still retaining the traces of youthful beauty, which had descended to her two daughters, now respectively aged nineteen and twenty-one years. The eldest, Sarah, resembled her mother in disposition and manners, being rather reserved and formal, but the youngest, Caroline, a brunette in complexion, with large brilliant eyes, possessed a joyous, cheerful heart, and a light, happy temperament of mind, which enlivened all around her, and was decidedly her father's favourite, from her entire devotion to his wishes. When setting out on his pony to visit his distant parishioners, Carry (as she was usually called) would bring her father his hat, stick, and gloves, not forgetting in bad weather his great-coat also ; and with all these, and many such little attentions, ever anxious and solicitous to please him, it is no matter of surprise that she became his particular pet. She was also his general companion in his walks and visits to

the poor, by whom, as feeling a deep interest in all their wants and sorrows, Miss Caroline was regarded as a being from a brighter sphere,—pure, spotless, and beneficent as an angel of light.

Of all the beautiful and varied works of creation, and the more minutely they are examined the more beautiful they appear, there is not one more beautiful than a dear, chaste, affectionate, cheerful girl of nineteen, in the first freshness of woman's loveliness. It was on the day after the conversation we have related as having taken place between Mrs. Fitzwarine and her son, that Mr. Middleton and his family were seated in their morning room, engaged in various occupations of reading, writing, and needle-work, when Miss Pringle, a spinster, to whom any age might be given, from forty to sixty, and who had occupied apartments over the baker's shop for the last five years, suddenly rushed into the room, exclaiming, “Ah, my dear good friends, busy I see, as usual! but have you heard the news?”

“What news, Miss Pringle?” asked Mrs.

Middleton, laying aside for a moment her work.

“Why, my dear, that Miss Seaton is going to be married directly to Sir Everard Hilston. Quite true, I assure you; had it from the very best authority. Wedding clothes all ordered.”

“And pray, my dear Miss Pringle,” enquired the Pastor, “what might you call the best authority?”

“Just listen, my good friend, and you shall hear all. Yesterday, being market-day at Heddington, I got a lift as usual in the baker’s cart, to do my little shopping for the week, and having a spare hour, just stepped into Miss Williams’s shop to see some pretty new bonnets exhibited in her window. Well, you see, one thing leads to another, and from young ladies’ bonnets we began talking of the young ladies also, and Miss Seaton in particular, for whom she had just made a pretty new dress. ‘Have you heard, Miss Pringle,’ she asked me with a meaning smile, ‘anything of Miss Florence lately?’—‘No, what?—You don’t say so, do you? Going to be married!

Well, I declare!—‘No, you mustn’t declare anything, Miss Pringle,’ Miss Williams replied, ‘because it’s a secret yet; but Mrs. Simpkins, Mrs. Seaton’s lady’s maid, was here yesterday, and told me in confidence that Sir Everard Hilston was almost every day at Forest Lodge, and her mistress quite approved the match, so you may expect soon to have an order for her wedding-dress.’ There, my dear sir,” addressing Mr. Middleton, “don’t you call that good first-rate authority?”

“First-rate gossip, Miss Pringle,” replied the vicar, with a good-humoured smile. “Now I may tell you that I called yesterday at Forest Lodge, and Miss Florence being one of my pets, in whom I take a deep interest, I did venture, when alone with her, on a little raillery about Sir Everard’s frequent visits, asking when my assistance at a little ceremony in the parish church would be required. ‘Never with him, my dear Mr. Middleton,’ she replied; ‘Sir Everard is mamma’s visitor, not mine.’”

“Ah, my dear sir,” interrupted Miss Pringle, “young ladies won’t confess these things

to gentlemen—very odd if they should—so I will back my authority against yours."

"And I will bet you half-a-crown, Miss Pringle," said Caroline, laughing, "that Florence never becomes Lady Hilston."

"I never bet, my dear," replied Miss Pringle, "but I shall hold my opinion still. By-the-way, have you heard anything lately of that wonderful animal, Macgregor the Hermit? They do say, my dears, that he holds communion with evil spirits, and that a dark figure has often been seen to emerge from his dwelling in the dusk of evening, and disappear among the heather."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Mr. Middleton, not heeding Miss Pringle, "how forgetful I have been of a message to you, Carry, that Florence will call or send the pony-carriage this afternoon for you to spend a week at the Lodge, which, knowing you had no other engagement, I said you would be happy to do. Have I done wrong in accepting the invitation, my child?"

"Oh, no, dear papa, I shall be delighted to

go, provided you can dispense with my services so long."

"Yes, yes, my dear girl, I must contrive to manage as well as I can without you, for that short time, so get your things ready without delay ;" on which Carry disappeared, and Miss Pringle, seeing her gossip not palatable to the Pastor, sallied forth to find some more patient listeners.

Florence, glad to escape the expected visit of Sir Everard, drove over after luncheon for Caroline, and the two friends returned together to Forest Lodge, where Caroline's presence operated as a decided bar to Sir Everard's *tête-à-têtes* with Florence ; for knowing her dislike of the Baronet's attentions, Caroline took especial care to prevent her friend being left alone with him, and even Mrs. Seaton (to whom his frequent visits, without any hint or allusion of proposing for her daughter's hand, had become very irksome) rejoiced at Caroline's intervention, as a means of forcing an expression of his true sentiments. But she little knew Hilston's real character, until convinced by personal observation ; for

the worthy Baronet, satisfied or sated with gazing on Florence's beauty, and seeing her cool reception of his addresses, now turned his attentions in good earnest to Caroline Middleton, whom he thought even more lovely, and certainly more *piquant* than Florence Seaton ; and Caroline appeared inclined to give him every encouragement ; so much so, indeed, that Florence, thinking him a most desirable match for her friend, left them frequently together, glad to escape to her own room.

At the end of a fortnight (Caroline having been induced by Florence to prolong her visit) Mrs. Seaton became so annoyed at Sir Everard's changeable conduct, that she questioned her daughter if any unpleasantry had occurred between them.

“ No, mamma, not the least.”

“ Then has Sir Everard proposed to you, my dear Florence ?”

“ No, dear mamma, nor did I expect anything of the kind, from what Henry told me before leaving us. He assured me he was a vain, frivolous person, most unlikely to

marry, and warned me against trusting to anything he might say."

"Then, my dear, I consider his behaviour to us both so impertinent, I shall desire Donald to say, the next time he calls, that we are not at home. What could anyone expect from his constant visits here, and marked attentions to you?—And the report, Simpkins tells me, is all over Heddington, that Sir Everard had been accepted by Miss Seaton."

"That, dear mamma, he never would be, as his is not a character I could even respect."

"It is well now, my child, the case is so; but I must confess I gave him credit for honourable, upright intentions; and I thought he had rendered himself most agreeable to yourself; but no doubt now remains of his having presumed upon my defenceless position since the Admiral's departure, and your cousin's absence—seeing we had no protector to call him to account for his insolent behaviour to us both. Caroline's conduct, however, is not what I expected of her in my house, giving him such encouragement."

" My dear mamma, she is only amusing herself at his expense,—for she is already deeply attached to another person."

Mrs. Seaton was spared the necessity of denying Sir Everard so soon as she hoped ; for that variable individual having ascertained from Caroline that she should return home on the Saturday, his visits were suddenly transferred from the Lodge to the Vicarage, where he was found the following Monday, in cosy chat with the vicar's wife and daughters, when the worthy vicar returned from his morning walk,—the object of his visit being ostensibly some parochial business with Mr. Middleton, as he had large property in his parish.

The fact was, this vain, unprincipled fool—for such he was—entertained the idea, from Caroline's unsuspecting, guileless nature, and her buoyant spirits in society, that he might achieve an easy conquest over her heart, and succeed in detaching her from her parents' roof, without the trouble of making her his wife ; and, knowing Mr. Middleton's straitened income, he calculated on pacifying the

father by the offer of a better living, which he expected daily to fall into his gift as patron, on the death of the present incumbent, who had reached his eightieth year, and was represented as in a rapidly declining state.

“I have been thinking,” suggested he, one day, when he again called at the Vicarage, “that so zealous and excellent a minister as yourself, Mr. Middleton, is quite lost in this secluded village, and that you require a larger field for the display of your superior talents.”

“I am perfectly satisfied with my place in the vineyard,” replied the Vicar, “and should be sorry now to leave my humble friends in this parish.”

“Yes, no doubt you would,” added Sir Everard; “but I am expecting a capital living in my gift to fall vacant very shortly; it shall be at your service, if you will favour me by accepting it.”

Poor Mr. Middleton, not dreaming of the dark plot hatching against his daughter, expressed his grateful thanks to Sir Everard for his generous offer, but requested a little time for consideration.

“ Oh ! take a month, if you please, my dear sir,” replied the baronet, gaily ; “ but I shall pester you continually with my presence until you give your consent, for really you must permit me to say, you would be scarcely doing justice to your accomplished daughters, by permitting them to be buried in this outlandish place, if you neglect the opportunity of bringing them more into the world.”

“ That is the only consideration which would have weight with me,” replied the Vicar, “ and on their account I would make some sacrifice of my own feelings.”

The baronet did not then press the matter farther, and soon after withdrew, to return to the charge against Caroline, with renewed energy, on the third morning, when his reception by the young lady impressed him with the hope of a most favourable issue.

CHAPTER XVI.

TEN days had now elapsed since Sir Everard's last visit to Forest Lodge ; and Hugh Fitzwarine, having heard of his attentions being transferred to Caroline Middleton, was meditating a visit there, when passing through the glen one fine afternoon, on his return from shooting, he met Florence Seaton walking alone, at a sharp angle of the drive, so that he came unexpectedly upon her, and his first glance detected the traces of tears visible in her still overflowing eyes. On recognizing him, Florence turned abruptly round, towards home, when Hugh, quickening his pace, soon overtook her, and in a low, sad tone, said,—

“ Oh, Florence ! why would you thus avoid me ?”

“ You have avoided Forest Lodge so long,” she replied, in an offended tone, “ that I thought it indifferent to you if ever we met again.”

“ Oh, Florence !” he exclaimed, “ never can you be indifferent to Hugh Fitzwarine, whose whole thoughts and heart have long, too long, perhaps, for his own peace, been entirely your own ; but that implied reproach has now broken the seal from my lips. Florence, dear Florence,” he murmured, “ I can no longer now restrain that expression of my long pent-up, long subdued love which has so often trembled on my tongue ; tell me, in mercy tell me,” — gently taking her hand — “ if I have loved and hoped in vain.”

Her agitation at these words became so perceptible, and her confusion so great, that Hugh, thinking she would faint, placed his arm round her waist to prevent her falling, whispering,—

“ Dearest Florence, do not agitate yourself

thus ; let Hugh's arm support you now, as it has before."

With an effort, she struggled to release herself, when he said,—

" Florence, you are free ; can you dread these arms, in which your unconscious form has twice before securely rested ? Oh ! let me once more support you, if for the last time."

Exhausted by contending, overpowering emotions, she yielded to his embrace, sobbing convulsively, until relieved by a flood of tears ; when, gently disengaging herself, she murmured,—

" Dear Hugh, you have not loved me in vain."

They were yet standing together, Hugh pouring forth the fulness of his heart, when suddenly Macgregor appeared before them.

" You have well chosen, Florence Seaton !" he exclaimed, " an honest lad in preference to a dishonest man of the world. And he who has kept his word to a stranger, is not likely to break his faith to you. Shrink not from me, poor child"—as Florence recoiled from

his advance,—“I know you well, and your love for Hugh Fitzwarine. Give me your hand ;” which, having timidly offered, he placed in that of her lover. “ You have pledged your faith to each other, and, in the sight of Heaven, I pronounce you man and wife. Kneel down and receive my blessing,” which he gravely pronounced upon them ; and then again joining their hands, said, “ I am witness to your union, and I charge you both, break not your vows now registered above ; rise, and attend to my warning ; let your pledge, and the part I have now taken, be revealed to no mortal ears—not even your own mother’s, until you have my permission to disclose it. Question not my act or authority now—none dare dispute it. Farewell !”

Florence breathed more freely when he was gone, and whispered,—

“ Oh ! Hugh, what a strange man ! Who is he ? I felt spell-bound in his presence. What authority can he possess over us, to command our obedience ?”

“ I cannot tell, my own dear girl ; but it is quite evident that the secrets of ourselves and

families are well known to him, and we must not at present offend him.”

“ Well, Hugh, will you tell me now why you have remained so long absent from us ?”

“ I saw, dear girl, your mother’s change of manner towards me ; and had my visits been continued, Sir Everard would have made them an excuse for his retirement, thereby incensing Mrs. Seaton against me. He has now no scapegoat to bear his dishonourable conduct, and his true character is openly displayed. How thankful I am you were not deceived also !”

“ I was warned by Henry, as well as yourself,” she replied, “ although the warning was not needed ; for believe me, dear Hugh, I never could have loved Sir Everard Hilston, because I had taken a foolish fancy into my head,” she said, blushing and laughing, “ to prefer Hugh Fitzwarine.”

“ I fear, dearest Florence, it is, as you say, a foolish fancy, for I must tell you I am not rich at present in worldly goods ; but, dear girl, I may say, that devotedly as I do love you, I had not revealed my secret, but for

your reproachful words and tearful eyes just now. Your mother will most probably object to my youth and want of fortune, for I have only at this moment five hundred a year of my own, entirely at my own disposal, although the Abbey, with all the property belonging to it, will also be mine at my dear mother's decease. More I have not now in my power to offer you, my own loved girl, than a home at the Abbey, where my mother will receive you as her own child, with outstretched arms."

"Oh, dear Hugh, do not talk of these things now; I cannot think of leaving dear mamma yet, even for you—but whenever I do, a cottage would suffice, shared with you."

"My present income, dearest, will keep us far above that, or I would not have revealed my love, to drag you into poverty."

"Pray say no more on this subject, dear Hugh, or I shall take offence—but now, what shall I do? I dare not tell mamma, after that strange man's words, what has passed between us here, neither must you. We can meet as usual, and even without that strange man's

warning, I should have wished you not to speak to mamma just yet."

"Ah! Florence, I see you dare not trust me, or, perhaps, intend only a little flirtation to amuse yourself at my expense, until Sir Everard returns, or some more wealthy suitor, when the poor young Abbot will be sent back to his cell."

"Well, Hugh, you must then be on your good behaviour, and mind never to presume too much on my favour—so now good bye, as mamma will wonder what has become of me;" when extending her hand, Hugh caught her to his heart, whispering, as he impressed the first kiss upon her lips—

"You are my own, dear Florence, now, and may Heaven protect you till we meet again."

"And when is that to be?" she asked.

"To-morrow, dear girl, I will call at my usual hour."

"Mind," she said, with a cheerful laugh, "you do not stay away for another month," as he turned to retrace his steps down his homeward track.

There is nothing more mortifying and hu-

miliating to a mother's feelings—to one at least who has any proper ones—than the reflection that she has been the cause of lowering her own daughter in the eyes of the world. Mrs. Seaton was conscious of having given Sir Everard every possible encouragement at her house, in the hope of his proposing for Florence, although so often warned by the Admiral of his character, as a well-known flirt; and, although actuated by the sole consideration of seeing her child well settled in life, yet she now felt degraded in her own sight, for having subjected her, when just entering upon the world, to the jesting and boasting insinuations of such a man as Sir Everard Hilston, by which her fair name might, perhaps, be tarnished, as the discarded of this dishonourable man.

Her maid, with the privilege of ladies' maids in general, had told her mistress as well as others of the common reports of her daughter's engagement to this odious man, who had already taken the opportunity of denying to her neighbours, the Middletons, that he had ever made any proposal at all to Miss Seaton,

or intended it, and that he scarcely knew which he preferred, mother or daughter. He had said, moreover, “that, although the trap had been so prettily baited for him by both, he was too old a bird to be caught by chaff.”

This elegant speech of Sir Everard’s was communicated by Caroline to her friend Florence, in a letter received the previous day, which she indignantly gave to her mother.

Mrs. Seaton was almost frenzied on reading its contents, and it was some time before Florence could check her mother’s outbreak of passion, on being insulted in this audacious manner.

“Pray cease, dear mamma, vexing yourself about this bad man.”

“Oh, Florence, my own dear child, it cuts me to the heart, that this insolent coxcomb should dare to speak of you so lightly—that *you* should be accused, a child almost in years, and quite so in purity of mind, of setting a trap for any one—my poor child, it almost breaks my heart!”

“Dearest mamma, you will make me miserable if you give way thus; indeed I do not

care the least about this vain, boasting man, as Caroline herself knew long ago—I never did, and never could, like him."

" Yes, my love, that may be all very well as far as the Middletons are concerned ; but as Sir Everard is so intimate with Lord Lessingham, and the first families in the county, this infamous story will be repeated to them, and your name tarnished by his false assertions. Oh ! that Henry had been here, to have called this dishonourable man to account !"

" I am thankful, dear mamma, that he is not, or the consequences might have been dreadful ; but pray do not torment yourself more about this unpleasant business, and let us not resume the subject, which will very soon be forgotten ; and I am happy to say Charlotte Norman will be here to-morrow evening, who will help to put you in better spirits."

Under Mrs. Seaton's excited and lacerated feelings, Hugh's visit the next afternoon proved most welcome, and she now repented of her former coolness to him, which she rightly surmised had caused his long absence from

Forest Lodge ; for, although never contemplating his union with her daughter, she saw at a glance that his presence there would go far to neutralise the report circulated by Sir Everard Hilston, and that *his* were not the only attentions paid to her ; in short, being too blinded by anger then, to reflect deeply on the consequences, she resolved to invite Hugh as often as possible to her house, thinking thereby to give the lie direct to Sir Everard's assertions ; for it appeared to her of vital importance to show to the world that Florence at least had never been duped by his artful addresses. So true is it, that to avoid present pressing evils, we run the risk of incurring others, of perhaps greater magnitude. Mrs. Seaton had involved herself in this difficulty by want of proper caution, out of which she saw no prospect of extricating herself, but by means equally distasteful to her ambitious views ; still, she thought of Hugh Fitzwarine as a boy only, who would not dream of marrying yet, and gave her daughter credit for too much good sense to accept any man without an ample settlement, the necessity of

which, like other mothers, she had continually impressed upon her youthful mind. Above all, she knew Hugh Fitzwarine to be a young man of strictly honourable and religious principles, and of unblemished character, with sufficient means of supporting a wife in a respectable sphere of life, even should her daughter foolishly fall in love with him. Under these circumstances, therefore, Hugh was most agreeably surprised by Mrs. Seaton's warm reception, who reproached him playfully for immuring himself so long in the Abbey, when his visits were so pleasing to her.

"I have been busily engaged," he replied, "with my harvest occupations, which being now finished, I shall have much pleasure in riding over here more frequently, provided I am not trespassing on your kindness."

"We shall be most happy to see you at all times, Mr. Fitzwarine; and as a young friend of mine, Miss Norman, is expected this evening, I hope you will dine with us tomorrow, and come over to enliven us with some singing in the mornings, when you have nothing better to occupy your time."

Hugh's thanks being expressed for this obliging invitation, he asked Florence to join in a duet; and Mrs. Seaton being called out of the room by Donald, some time elapsed before a song could be selected, as neither of them felt much in the humour for this amusement. Hugh could not forbear alluding to his gracious reception by Mrs. Seaton.

"To confess the truth," said Florence, "mamma has been dreadfully annoyed by the conduct of Sir Everard Hilston—"

"Because," interrupted Hugh, playfully, "he did not propose for her daughter, which every one (who did not know this worthy Baronet) was led to expect—indeed it was currently reported that Miss Florence had accepted him."

"And did you believe this report?" she enquired, rather indignantly.

"Yes, Florence—nearly so; for appearances justified the rumour; and the last two days I called here, finding him sitting with you alone, I rode directly away, with blood-thirsty thoughts rankling in my heart, and inwardly

vowing he should never obtain your hand, except over my dead body—when suddenly Macgregor stood before me, and arrested my fell purpose, by exposing my own thoughts, and he added, ‘Florence Seaton weds not with that fool Hilston.’ Still I knew not what to believe; and this was the cause of my long absence.”

“Then do you still believe,” she asked, “that I would have accepted Sir Everard?”

“No, dear Florence; I do not now believe you would have done so; but I dreaded your mother’s influence, who evidently gave him every encouragement. Then a proposal *was* made?”

“He did not actually propose; because I checked him at the commencement of a very fine speech about love and devotion, by abruptly telling him I had only considered him as mamma’s friend, who was acquainted with *his* mother in early life, and I could never receive him in any other light, and immediately left the room; but stay a few moments here, and I will return with a better proof.”

“There, Hugh,” she said, on entering the room with a letter, “read there my opinion a month ago, as expressed to Caroline Middleton.”

“My dear Florence, I am perfectly satisfied with your own explanation.”

“No, Hugh—that will not satisfy me. You are entitled now to my fullest confidence; and I, dear Hugh, must have yours. Appearances have, I know, been against me; so pray, for my sake, read that letter.”

The contents expressed sympathy for her friend Florence, in being so annoyed by the attentions of Sir Everard, whom she so much disliked, and other remarks to the same effect, concluding thus:—

“I know, dear Florence, you would never marry a man you did not love, even to please your mother; and I know this also, dear girl, although your blushes, and not your words, have revealed it to me, that your heart is not now in your own keeping; and I shall tell you some day the name of the person who has stolen it. What do you think of

the letter F? Is it not the prettiest in the whole alphabet?

“ Your affectionate Friend,
“ C. M.”

Hugh folded up the letter ; and on Florence asking him if he was now satisfied, she was encircled in his arms.

“ Yes, my dear girl,” he whispered, “ I am more than satisfied.”

“ Then let me go,” she said quickly. “ You forget you must be still on your good behaviour. So now for our song.”

“ I really have no patience to-day to practise a duet,” he replied.

“ Then you know, Hugh, that a bird which can sing, and won’t sing, must be made to sing ; and as mamma wishes to exhibit your fine vocal powers to Miss Norman, who is a first-rate musician, you must have a lesson now ; for unless you have been joining in the quavers and shakes of your old friends in the Abbey ruins, your voice has been untuned for more than a month ; but I will be satisfied with one duet and one solo, after which you

shall be rewarded by a walk in the garden and a peach."

The last notes had just ceased, when Mrs. Seaton entered the room, and Florence said—

"Dear mamma, may I show Mr. Fitzwarine our peaches and nectarines in the kitchen garden? which Donald will maintain are the finest in the neighbourhood, but Mr. Fitzwarine thinks they cannot equal those on the Abbey walls."

"Oh! certainly, my love," replied Mrs. Seaton; and telling Hugh she would return in a few minutes, Florence ran up stairs for her bonnet, and soon descended to the drawing-room, looking in Hugh's eyes more lovely than ever.

"Hugh," asked Florence, during their walk, "who can that Macgregor be, whom you dread so to offend, and whose influence neither of us could resist? That man has haunted me ever since—his strong, emphatic words still ring in my ears—'Question not my authority now—none dare dispute it'—and yet I must not long conceal from dear mamma our engagement; for fondly as I do, and ought to

love you, dear Hugh—you who saved my life—I could never marry you without her consent.”

“Neither would I ask your hand on any other terms, my beloved girl; although in mercy promise me never to marry another, or the dark waters of the moat, which once covered your dear form, would soon be the grave of Hugh Fitzwarine.”

“My faith has been pledged to you, my dear Hugh, in the sight of heaven and in the presence of Macgregor; and from that vow I will never waver.”

“But, my dear girl, notwithstanding Macgregor’s warning, I feel bound in honour to reveal my love for you to Mrs. Seaton, and ask her sanction to our union.”

“Not yet,” exclaimed Florence. “Let all blame rest on me; but first see and consult that man, of whom I stand in such dread.”

“It shall be done without delay, Florence; and to-morrow, or the next day, you shall know the result.”

They then returned to the house, and Hugh soon after took his leave.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE following morning, Hugh rode over to consult Macgregor, whom he found, as usual, employed in his garden. On explaining the object of his visit, Macgregor surveyed him with a stern, angry look, exclaiming, “Then you disregard my warning, Hugh Fitzwarine?”

“Indeed I do not, sir,” was his quiet reply.

“The woman tempts you.”

“Nay, not so,” replied Hugh. “Florence Seaton insisted on my first consulting you, before speaking to her mother.”

“It is well she did so,” answered the Recluse. “Now mark my words to her and

you.—Rush not rashly on your fate, for Mrs. Seaton will reject you.”

“ Then have I the choice only,” Hugh said, despondingly, “ between defeat or dishonour.—A Fitzwarine cannot hesitate.—He will not choose the latter.”

“ Rash boy !” cried Macgregor, his eyes flashing fire—“ dare you disobey me ?—Dare you or Florence Seaton reveal what passed between us in yonder glen ?”

“ Never ! sir,” replied Hugh, raising himself to his full height. “ That scene is to all others, save Florence and myself, as if it had never been ; and the gratitude I owe you for placing her hand in mine will cease only with my existence. But surely I am in honour bound to ask Mrs. Seaton’s approval of my addresses to her daughter ?”

“ Hugh Fitzwarine,” said Macgregor, still fiercely, “ I forbid you—provoke me no further—begone !”

“ May I know, then,” asked Hugh, submissively, “ the authority I am desired to obey ?”

“ No, sir, you may not, *now*, but shall here-

after, if you prove worthy. The honour of even Lord Fitzwarine is safe in my keeping, until he knows my further pleasure; be silent, and cautious how you act. Now leave me."

Macgregor's voice assumed a milder, melancholy tone, as he uttered these last words; and Hugh, thinking he perceived a tear standing in his eye, said, impressively, as he turned from him,

"God bless you, sir! Farewell."

Macgregor quickened his pace, and rapidly entered the house.

That same evening Fitzwarine presented himself in Mrs. Seaton's drawing-room, some time before the dinner-hour, and Florence was the first to welcome his arrival, to whom he briefly whispered,—

"Macgregor will not permit me, yet, to speak to your mother. To-morrow I will call again, and you shall hear all he said."

His caution was not ill-timed, as immediately after the door opened, and Miss Norman entered, fully prepared for conquest.

This young lady, Florence's senior by three years, was a fine, fashionable-looking girl, of

handsome, though rather large features. She was an accomplished musician, possessing rather a powerful than sweet voice ; highly talented in other respects, and, it must be admitted, greatly addicted to flirtation. Charlotte Norman could not be called a friend of Florence Seaton's, since they had not two ideas in common, and their feelings were diametrically opposite ; still, they had played as children together, were old acquaintances, if not friends ; and Mrs. Seaton hailed her arrival at Forest Lodge just at this particular moment with great delight, as a cheerful and pleasant companion to her daughter.

Florence had given Hugh previously a short account of Charlotte Norman, with her *pens-
chant* for flirting ; and on being introduced, Hugh made rather a formal bow, which the young lady returned by a most profound mock curtsey, almost bending to the ground, and the easy grace with which she recovered her erect position elicited his approving smile. Florence looked anything but pleased at this first commencement of hostilities by her friend, which she suspected would end in an

attempt to draw Hugh into a flirtation with herself, and, of course, not the most remote hint of their mutual attachment could be entrusted to such a girl as Charlotte Norman.

A few neighbours having been invited to dine at Forest Lodge that evening, Mr. and Mrs. Bertie were just then announced, and soon afterwards the worthy vicar of the parish, with his wife and daughter Caroline. Mr. Bertie was of foreign extraction, although educated in England, and had lately succeeded to a landed estate and old-fashioned manor-house, added to and transformed into a large, modern-looking villa, purchased by his father, a few years before his death, and situated about three miles from Forest Lodge, called “Belvidere.” Mr. Bertie, having the reputation of being a man of considerable wealth, had married, three years before his introduction to my readers, the only daughter of a naval officer, a young lady of great beauty, who was said to have accepted him in a fit of pique, when slighted by her first lover. Now to Mr. Bertie, as far as personal appearances

went, little exception could be taken, since he was generally considered good-looking, having a fair complexion and regular features, with luxuriant light-brown hair ; yet in manners, airs, and style of dress, he resembled too much the *petit maître*, being frivolous and foppish in the extreme, and a poor copyist of the D'Orsay school. Having travelled through Egypt and Turkey, he adopted, when in his own house, the oriental costume, sitting, after the Turkish fashion, for hours together in his dressing-gown and slippers, smoking an immense hookah. Yet, with these few eccentricities, Mr. Bertie could make himself agreeable, possessing a great deal of humour, and was well received in the neighbourhood, from his wife's family connections being of high standing in the county ; albeit of too liberal ideas about women and marriage. It is a notorious fact, that Frenchmen, although most impassioned, most devoted and agreeable lovers, generally speaking make shockingly bad husbands, for it never enters into their imagination, when married, "to hold one sacred flame through life unchanged," &c.

Mr. and Mrs. Bertie lived in good style, with their carriages, horses, and servants ; but the amount of their hospitality extended to some five or six grand dinner-parties during the year, when the entertainment was conducted in gaudy style, as to the show of plate, &c. ; but the *cuisine* being under the supervision of a French *artiste*, the dishes resembled their master, in their frivolous and light composition, so much that Mrs. Bertie's uncle used to say that, when invited to dine at Belvidere, he always made a substantial luncheon first at home, since, with the exception of boiled fowl and tongue, and a remove of game, for which there were so many applicants ; instead of a *feast*, it always proved a *fast* to him. His poor little niece, however, had little control over the domestic arrangements, being in reality almost a cipher in her own house ; in short, although an exceedingly pretty and elegant little person, of the pocket Venus order, and highly accomplished also, she bore now, after only three years' probation of the married state, the unmistakable aspect of a disappointed, unhappy woman.

Bertie was an outrageous flirt ; and his poor little wife having in an evil hour invited a too pretty cousin to pay her a visit, to relieve the dreariness of unpleasant *tête-à-têtes* with the man she had espoused, this young lady proved her gratitude by entering into a *liaison* with her husband, which increased Mrs. Bertie's wretchedness a hundred-fold, from her inability to get rid of this now detested visitor, Mr. Bertie insisting on her cousin, Miss Arundel, remaining at Belvidere as long as she found it agreeable.

With this short account of this ill-matched pair, and the cousin, we must for the present content ourselves. They were now ushered into Mrs. Seaton's drawing-room, accompanied by Count Morier, then staying at Belvidere. Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn, with their son, and John Newman, completing the list of guests invited on this occasion.

Mrs. Seaton having a superior housekeeper, the dinner was served up in elegant English fashion ; and even the fastidious Bertie could see little cause for reflection on the *cuisine*,

although containing rather more substantial fare than that exhibited at his own table.

Hugh Fitzwarine, when dinner was announced, had adroitly appropriated Florence to himself, whilst Mrs. Seaton was occupied in pairing the rest of the company, which had been arranged apparently to their entire satisfaction, from the good humour which prevailed afterwards on both sides of the table. Count Morier being assigned to Charlotte Norman, who had spent the two last winters in Paris, was engaged soon in an animated conversation with that young lady about the gaieties, public places of amusement, and recreations of the French metropolis, and, with the exception of Herbert Franklyn, a genteel, handsome young man of five-and-twenty, who, in addition to his good looks, possessed also a most amiable disposition, light good-humour prevailed with all during the dinner-hour.

Herbert Franklyn, having been for some time deeply attached to Caroline Middleton, had been paying her assiduous attention the last three months, when Sir Everard Hils-ton interposed between them ; and poor Her-

bert, being naturally shy and unpretending, fell back in dismay from the contest with his rich and influential rival, who, from his frequent visits to the Vicarage, appeared to have the sanction of her parents for his addresses to their daughter.

After the ladies had retired, Mr. Bertie, turning to Hugh Fitzwarine, inquired if he had seen his old fellow-collegian, Hilston, lately.

“No,” replied Hugh, “he has never done me the honour of calling at the Abbey.”

“Ah! indeed, I am rather surprised at that,” remarked Bertie.

“Which,” added Hugh, “has not in the least surprised me, for we were never on intimate terms at college, and are likely to be less so now; Hilston is a man I never could esteem.”

“Well,” continued Bertie, “I conclude you are rather difficult to please; but he is held in high estimation by the ladies, and I believe may have his choice of any girl in the county; although, being such a fastidious fellow, he says, after trying them all round, not one has

yet come up to his expectations, not even the beautiful, accomplished daughter of our excellent hostess."

"Vain, boasting, contemptible cur!" exclaimed Hugh, his dark eye flashing with excited anger.

"You appear to feel warmly on this subject," sneered Bertie.

"And have good cause," replied Hugh, "after his infamous conduct to the sister of my oldest friend."

"Then why did he not call Hilston to account for it, Mr. Fitzwarine?"

"Simply because, being a clergyman, he could not do so."

"You might have been his substitute," added Bertie.

"And would most willingly," rejoined Hugh, "had I been made acquainted with this transaction, which happened last autumn, and of which I was not informed till I met my friend at the archery meeting in Lord Lessingham's grounds."

"Ah, no doubt," continued Bertie, "a baronetcy, and twenty thousand a year, is worth

trying hard for ; but Hilston has too much sense to commit matrimony.”

“ Too little honesty would be the right term to apply to him,” said Hugh ; “ but he has sufficient sense to avoid young ladies who have brothers or fathers to protect them.”

“ I cordially concur in every word spoken by Mr. Fitzwarine,” interposed Herbert Franklyn, “ in reference to the conduct of Sir Everard Hilston.”

“ To which,” added Newman, “ I must also give my full assent ; and as to his indelicate insinuations respecting Miss Seaton, her cheerful countenance and good spirits this evening are quite sufficient to give the most positive denial to her heart having been in the smallest degree affected by Sir Everard’s polite attentions ; and I am not less surprised than disgusted, that a man moving in his position should have been base enough so to misrepresent the civility shown to him by an old friend of his mother’s.”

Mr. Bertie, seeing the tide running in from so many quarters against him, endeavoured to modify Sir Everard’s assertions, and the sub-

ject was discontinued. The worthy Vicar sat a silent, though not uninterested listener to this conversation, and his reflections not being of the most agreeable nature, the introduction of coffee, soon after, afforded him an opportunity of proposing an adjournment to the drawing-room, which was readily embraced by all.

“ You *make* music, I suppose, this evening,” simpered Bertie, as he approached Miss Seaton.

“ And you gentlemen discord,” said Charlotte Norman, who was sitting by her side, “ if we are to judge by the loud voices in the dining-room just now.”

“ Merely a little ebullition of temper on the part of Mr. Fitzwarine, who is, as perhaps Miss Seaton may have discovered, a little hasty sometimes.”

“ Not without great provocation, I believe,” replied Florence, with a slight blush.

“ Well,” added Miss Norman, “ in my opinion a quick-tempered man is preferable to a sulky one; with the first the storm quickly rises, and as quickly subsides into calm

weather again ; but with the latter, the dark, threatening thunder-clouds hang suspended over your head for days together.”

“ *Apropos* to music, have you any engagement for Friday in next week, Miss Seaton ?” asked Bertie ; “ we expect Lablache and Grisi, who have been starring it in the North, to assist at a little music party we intend giving that evening. Doors open at eight, performance to commence at nine precisely ; but, by-the-bye, I expect Hilston”—(with a half laugh and searching look)—“ perhaps his presence may be an objection ?”

“ Not to me, Mr. Bertie, if mamma has no other engagement,” Florence replied very quietly, without betraying the least emotion.

A movement was now made to the piano by Mrs. Bertie and the Count, who, after enlivening the company with two Italian duets, gave place to Charlotte Norman and Mr. Bertie, who plumed himself upon his musical talents in singing, which were, however, almost drowned by Miss Norman’s more full and powerful compass of voice. During these performances Florence being occupied in look-

ing over her music-books, Hugh sat with Caroline Middleton, engaged in earnest conversation, Herbert Franklyn's eye being intently fixed upon them, which Hugh observing, rose soon after, and approaching him, said in a low tone, " You have nothing to fear ; go and join Caroline."

" Thank you, Hugh, for your kind interest about me ; but my society is not, I fear, desired."

" Do as I tell you, Herbert," was the short response, as Florence approached them, saying her mother had commissioned her to ask Hugh to favour them with a song.

" Your mother's wishes will, I hope, always meet with my willing and cheerful compliance, Florence, although, save for her, I should decline singing to-night."

" May I ask why, Hugh ? "

" Because there are so many able musicians here, who will only ridicule my unartistical style."

" Of the gentlemen I am sure you need not stand in awe, and I think you have the ladies on your side ; so come, Master Hugh, and

repeat the lesson we were practising yesterday."

Refusal being out of the question, Hugh took his station at the instrument by the side of Florence, and although a sneer might have been seen at first on Mr. Bertie's face, it underwent a rapid change, as Hugh's full, rich notes fell upon his ear ; and at the conclusion, the Count exclaimed in ecstasies, "*Ah, mais c'est magnifique ! de voices, dey match so well ! and Monsieur, he do for public singer !*"

Bertie also expressed his astonishment to Charlotte Norman, remarking that Mr. Fitzwarine had come out quite in a new character, as he had never heard of his knowing a note of music before that evening.

"He has a splendid voice," replied Charlotte, "and, with a little more cultivation, might rank amongst the first professionals."

After one solo, requested by Mrs. Seaton, to which Florence played the accompaniment, Hugh withdrew to the other end of the room, where Herbert and Caroline were sitting together. Mrs. Seaton felt exceedingly gratified by the compliments paid on her daughter's

and Fitzwarine's singing, and Mr. Bertie expressed a hope that she might prevail on him to accompany her daughter and herself to their party at Belvidere the ensuing week.

"Mr. Fitzwarine is not staying at Forest Lodge, and I do not approve of Florence singing before a large audience," Mrs. Seaton replied.

"But as our entertainment is to conclude with a dance for the amusement of the young people, we hope for the honour of Miss Seaton's company."

Mrs. Seaton, thinking this a good opportunity of showing Florence's indifference to Sir Everard's late attentions, accepted the invitation; on which Bertie withdrew, for the purpose of conciliating matters with Fitzwarine, whom he considered now a great acquisition to his musical *soirées*. Hugh met his overtures rather coolly, and declined the invitation, on which Bertie said, "Well, perhaps you are right in refusing to meet Hilston, after having expressed yourself so unreservedly on his conduct."

"That remark alone is sufficient to induce me to accept your invitation, Mr. Bertie, as I

never say that behind any man's back I dare not tell himself."

" Well, Fitzwarine, I shall be delighted to see you, but let there be no quarrel in my house."

" None of my seeking, rest assured," was the reply.

The party soon after began to disperse, and on Hugh taking leave of Florence, he asked in a low voice, " Have I kept my proper distance to-night ?"

" Almost too well," she said, with a smile.

" Then to-morrow, at twelve, I shall see you again."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE next morning Florence was racking her brain how to dispose of her visitor on Hugh's arrival, as she was particularly anxious to hear all about his interview with Macgregor, when, after breakfast, that young lady begged permission to remain in her own room to answer some letters just received, to which of course a most ready assent was given. Mrs. Seaton was in the drawing-room when Hugh called, by whom he was most graciously received, and thanked for his handsome supply of game, with which her table had been furnished the previous evening, and Hugh, in return, said he was commissioned by his mo-

ther to ask for a few cuttings of a geranium she had admired so much when last with Florence in the conservatory. Florence was of course appealed to, to show the plant, and thus an opportunity afforded for the meeting so much desired, at which Hugh related all that passed between himself and Macgregor, and in concluding said, “Thus, dear Florence, all my honourable resolutions are at present overturned, for that man has clearly a very deep interest in our future welfare, and possesses some secret power over our destiny, which none but himself can explain. His caution, therefore, shall not be unheeded by me; and from this hour, as I dare not reveal the feelings of my heart to your mother, I must be on my guard not to excite remarks by any particular attentions to you in public.”

“I must reluctantly admit, dear Hugh, it is the only course open to you at present, but I trust you will soon be relieved from this disagreeable position, so irksome to us both. Charlotte Norman has, perhaps, arrived at a fortunate moment, but you must be

cautious how you act towards me in her presence, for to her I could not confide our secret."

"Fear me not, my own dearest girl," replied Hugh, "and to avoid any remarks, we will return to the house with the cuttings I have taken for my mother."

"One question remains unanswered, Hugh ; what caused your loss of temper after dinner yesterday ?"

"I would rather have declined giving you a reply, my dear girl ; but as you persist in renewing the subject, it arose from Bertie repeating some impertinent remark of that cur Hilston, about his having the choice of all the prettiest girls in the county, yourself not excepted ; for which he brought down on himself the indignation of all the party, even rousing Newman's anger, so I beg you will cut that impertinent puppy whenever you meet him."

"That I will certainly do, dear Hugh ; but you must not involve yourself in any way with Sir Everard on my account, or the world will judge accordingly ; for my sake promise me not to quarrel with him."

“Trust to my discretion, dear Florence, I will not, nor have I in the least compromised you, his treatment of my friend’s sister being sufficient reason for my rebukes.”

On returning to the house, Hugh was asked by Mrs. Seaton to partake of luncheon, during which she enquired if he was invited to Belvidere next week. This question being answered in the affirmative, Mrs. Seaton said—

“If you will dine with us that evening, we can give you a seat in the carriage, as we shall be three ladies without a cavalier, and I must hire a pair of post-horses.”

“You can dispense with them,” replied Hugh, “as a pair of my Cleveland bays, which work on the farm, are, with a steady driver, quite at your service.”

“Thank you, Mr. Fitzwarine; then you will return with us, and take a bed here that night, as we must not treat our protector so inhospitably as to send him home so late—can we, Charlotte?” appealing to Miss Norman.

“Oh, certainly not,” replied that young lady; “he must receive fair treatment at our hands, and I wish we could retain his services

for a week, as I am dreadfully nervous without a gentleman in the house."

"To flirt with?" asked Hugh, laughing.

"Yes, Mr. Fitzwarine, if you like—the dullest drones are preferable to none at all; and you are just a quiet, demure young gentleman, whom I look upon already as one of my younger brothers, to do all that is required of him—to walk with one, talk with one, flirt, ride, and dance with one, when I have no better to supply the vacancy; and then at a ball, how convenient to have such a person to fall back upon, as always engaged to you, when one does not want to accept a disagreeable partner."

"Well, Miss Norman," replied Hugh, good-humouredly, "is there any other capacity in which my services might be available, except being obliged to fall in love with you—that of course I must not presume to do?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Fitzwarine, until I attain the age of forty, and perhaps not then."

"Well, not intending to wait quite so long for a wife, you must either accept me soon or not at all," said Hugh, laughing.

“ You must propose first, Mr. Fitzwarine. I will not keep you long in suspense, but put you at once out of your misery, as considerate old ladies do their lap dogs, when aged and decrepid. Your greatest recommendation, however, is that you have a strong bass voice, and so has another animal, with rather long ears.”

“ Really, Charlotte,” exclaimed Mrs. Seaton, “ you are extremely rude this morning.”

“ Only tit for tat, dear Mrs. Seaton—Mr. Fitzwarine called me a flirt.”

“ Then I withdraw, with every apology, the offensive expression,” said Hugh, “ as it was uttered only in jest.—Are we to be friends or foes, Miss Norman ?”

“ Well, on reflection, I think the former, since there appears to be a great dearth of beaux in this immediate neighbourhood, and I may want you for a partner at Monsieur Bertie’s entertainment next week ; and as you will be most probably required to make a display of your *vocal organ*, as that gentleman describes the voice, I will endeavour to prepare you for the exhibition, if Mrs. Seaton does not object

to your coming here to receive a few lessons."

"To that, of course, Charlotte, I can have no objection, but you must take the consequences on yourself."

"As to what the world may say, as far as I am individually concerned, dear Mrs. Seaton, it may say, and will say what it lists ; and if Mr. Fitzwarine is afraid of the world, he had better remain shut up in the Abbey for the term of his natural life."

"Which not meditating, Miss Norman, I shall accept your kind offer of a lesson or two in singing with thankfulness."

The grave features of Florence, during this flirting colloquy, showed her disapproval of her friend's behaviour, and she began to entertain some suspicions how Hugh might be affected by this bold, but certainly fascinating girl ; in fact she now regretted having invited her to Forest Lodge ; much as she desired Hugh's company, she would prefer not seeing him at all, to seeing him (as she now dreaded) with Miss Norman occupying her position at the piano. Hugh divined what was passing

through her mind, and as he rose to take leave, said he must return to the conservatory for his cuttings, meaning this as a hint to Florence, which, however, she did not feel disposed to take, and he had to go alone.

The next day passed without Hugh making his appearance ; but on the following morning he rode there rather early, and overtook Florence alone, in her morning walk, by whom he was received very coolly, the cause of which was at last drawn from her, her annoyance at his flirtation with Miss Norman. Hugh endeavoured in vain to explain that his sole object was to make his singing with her an excuse for more frequent visits than he otherwise could consistently pay ; but seeing her still dissatisfied, he at last said—

“ Then I will not sing with Miss Norman at all.”

“ That would be in the other extreme,” she replied.

“ Then, dear Florence, do not pay yourself the poor compliment to think she could ever be preferred to you, and for the future you shall have no reason to complain of my con-

duct, which was assumed for a particular purpose."

Matters having been thus amicably settled, Hugh sang one duet with Miss Norman that morning, when he told her that, knowing Mr. Bertie's object in asking him to his party was for his voice not his company, he should not gratify him on that occasion, and therefore he might dispense with practising, although he should be happy at any time to join in a duet with Miss Norman, if required.

Now, Miss Norman being one of those young ladies who, the greater the obstacles thrown in their way, the greater their perseverance in surmounting them, on perceiving Hugh's disinclination to be led into a flirtation with herself, resolved to attempt a conquest over him, taking it for granted that a young man of his inexperience in the world would soon yield to her fascinating charms. Whenever he called, therefore, at Forest Lodge, the spell of her enchantment was thrown around him, with that cautious gracefulness which few men are able to resist, her forward, flirting manner being entirely aban-

doned. Florence herself almost trembled for the issue ; but what was her astonishment one evening on hearing from her friend that she really thought Mr. Fitzwarine a very good-looking, agreeable person, adding—

“ As your mamma does not consider him good enough, that is wealthy enough for you, my dear, he will do very well for me, one of five daughters to be provided for, supposing, of course, my dear friend, *you* have nothing to say against my making the attempt.”

Florence, annoyed by this speech, and conscience-stricken by her forced concealment of her love, answered quickly,—

“ I have nothing to say, Charlotte, against your making the attempt—you can act as you please.”

“ Very well, my dear ; then I shall lay siege against the Abbey and its owner.”

The next day, on Hugh’s calling again, he was struck by Florence’s reserve and coldness of manner to him ; and being left alone with her a few moments, tenderly inquired the cause of her looking so unhappy, when, instead of answering, she burst into tears and

left the room. Hugh was astonished at this outburst of grief, not knowing what had happened ; and he dared not make inquiries of Miss Norman, who soon after made her appearance, radiant in smiles ; but it was evident from her gaiety that nothing unpleasant had occurred in the family. Mrs. Seaton's features also wore their usual cheerful smile, when asking him to dine there that evening, to which Hugh most readily assented, —for that lady being made Charlotte's confidant, was glad of the opportunity to assist her views, by inviting Fitzwarine to her house.

Hugh, having sat an hour in a very unenviable state of mind, in the hope of again seeing Florence, made an excuse for shortening his visit, and went as usual to the stables for his horse. On riding away, he caught a glimpse of her form, walking hastily towards the glen ; and fearing she might as quickly return, if she recognized him, he allowed her to continue her walk, until quite secluded from view of the house, in the woods below ; then, taking a short turn to the right, he over-

took her near the spot where Macgregor had joined their hands together. On hearing his horse approaching, Florence turned suddenly round, and Hugh dismounting, seized her reluctant hand, exclaiming,—

“Florence! Florence! why do you thus again avoid me? What have I done to cause those tears to fall?”

With downcast, still averted eyes, and struggling to release her hand, she answered,

“Leave me, Mr. Fitzwarine; the place of Florence Seaton is now occupied by Miss Norman.”

For a moment Hugh stood in silent amazement at these words, when, releasing her hand, he said, proudly,—

“If Miss Seaton from her heart can think thus meanly of Hugh Fitzwarine,—if she will only say she believes him capable of breaking those vows registered here in the sight of Heaven, for the sake of a vain, heartless coquette—then, indeed, it is better we part, never to meet again; but here, in His presence who witnessed the first avowal of my love to you, I swear that love never has

changed, and never will change as long as life is spared me. Florence, do you believe me, or think I would lie to God, as well as to you?"

He stood, expecting her answer, with a calm, though haughty look of disdain—one glance of which told Florence he spoke the truth ; she had never seen him so intensely agitated before when speaking, and now so fearfully collected.

"Oh, Hugh !" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, "I cannot, would not doubt you ; but Miss Norman made me quite wretched by what she said last night, and I almost dreaded her influence might—"

"What, child ?—make me false to you ? Oh, Florence ! my own dear Florence ! can you think so poorly of my mind and heart, to be turned thus suddenly, to be controlled by a flirting, frivolous woman of the world, or so humbly of that sweet innocence, and far superior charm of beauty and modesty combined, which have bound me to you for ever, as with a link of adamant ? Florence, do you repent the vow you made here to be my own ?"

“Never, never!” she said, “I can never change to you!”

She was caught in a moment to his heart, and confidence was restored by a warm embrace.

“And now, dear girl,” said Hugh, “you must make some allowance for my very awkward position, which is unpleasant enough, without reflections from you I do not deserve; but it were imprudent just now to offend Miss Norman, who, I feel convinced, would prove a bitter enemy to us both, could she by any means discover our attachment.”

“I see it all, dear Hugh; and now let me return to the house, or she may follow me here.”

Florence’s caution proved wisely adopted, as, on emerging from the glen, that young lady was observed advancing hastily, and on meeting her, asked why she had not told her of her intended walk, in which she would have been glad to join.

“Why, Charlotte, I thought your time more agreeably occupied with Mr. Fitzwarine.”

“No, my dear, he proved the reverse of entertaining this morning ; and between ourselves, my impression is, with the gloomy fits he sometimes exhibits, I shall have a very dull time at the Abbey with his invalid mamma ; he looks just the kind of person to fall asleep in his arm-chair after dinner. Ah me ! what a prospect, with those dreadful owls hooting around one, and not another person to speak to, except that prosy old lady !”

“Then you had better give him up at once, Charlotte.”

“Oh, no, my love ! any life is preferable to living at home, where mamma duns me with continual reproaches for being still unmarried ; and only the day before my leaving she placed in my room a large bouquet of Michaelmas daisies, and attached to it a paper, on which was written ‘Summer is past !’ She tells me often that my four younger sisters have no chance of getting off her hands until I am settled in life. Thus, you see, my dear Florence, I am forced to seek another home, as soon as I can find one.”

“ You are not in love, then, with Mr. Fitzwarine ?”

“ What ! love at first sight, my dear ? Oh, no !—such romantic ideas are only expected in young ladies of seventeen. Then I admit I was desperately in love with a very handsome Captain of Dragoons, who, poor fellow, had barely sufficient means to support himself. Since then, I have been so severely lectured by mamma on the absurdity of love, as a mere girlish fancy, that I never think of it ; and as to Mr. Fitzwarine, he is good-looking and gentleman-like, although rather stupid sometimes. But I have been tutored never to throw away a chance. Yet, to confess the truth, Florence dear, I should prefer a very old gentleman, with plenty of money, so that I might have the prospect of selecting a man of my own free choice in a few years.”

“ Really, Charlotte, I am shocked to hear you express such heartless sentiments.”

“ Only wait, my dear, till you have reached my years of discretion — (now owning five-and twenty)—and you will then think as I

do now. You are young, and unsophisticated, as I was at your age."

"I hope never to experience such feelings, Charlotte, at any age," replied Florence, as they reached the hall door.

CHAPTER XIX.

WE will now pass over the intervening days, and usher the party from Forest Lodge into Mr. Bertie's new drawing-room, which, denuded of its fine carpet, was arranged with seats down the middle of the room ; and, instead of a few friends, as expected, being assembled, the company already arrived amounted to nearly a hundred, and greatly to their astonishment, instead of music being the order of the evening, the upper end of the room was converted into a stage for private theatricals. This Mr. Bertie intended as an agreeable surprise to his guests, the play being got up by friends staying in the house, who

had been rehearsing for the last fortnight ; and we must do them the justice to say that their parts were well sustained, meriting the approbation of the audience.

A short, popular comedy, succeeded by a very amusing farce, completed this part of the night's entertainment, when an adjournment was made to the ball-room.

The company invited consisted of nearly all the neighbouring families, Lord Lessingham's included, who brought with them a large party also, of whom the most distinguished was Lord Purvis, a man of considerable weight in the House of Lords, and holding the same political opinions as his host, Lord Lessingham. Lord Purvis was a little, thin, sallow-faced man in appearance, but clever, well-informed, and agreeable in society ; in age about sixty ; and the possessor of very large landed property. He had married one of his own rank, a young lady of high family, with whom, being of domestic habits, and his wife proving the reverse, he had lived very unhappily. The issue of this marriage was two children only, who died in infancy, owing, as

their father believed, to Lady Purvis's entire neglect and carelessness about them ; in short, she was quite a votary of fashionable life, to which her own life became at last a victim.

Lord Purvis, disgusted with his first wife's frivolous and heartless conduct towards her children, and more than ever anxious for an heir to his vast possessions, which failing, descended to a nephew for whom he entertained a very great dislike, he had resolved now on selecting some young girl of home education and homely ideas, who might prove a good mother to his expected children, and a comfort to himself in his declining years ; and having a wholesome dread of the daughters of the aristocracy, from having made a bad first choice, his thoughts were now bent on finding for his second some quiet, modest, unaffected young lady, of good old English family connections, who had not been introduced to London life.

In disposition Lord Purvis was austere and reserved—of the *martinet* school in his household, by whom he was feared and respected, not loved ; and without possessing any very

refined ideas, he viewed marriage as a means to an end; that end, or object, being the perpetuation of his old title and property in regular lineal descent. A wife was considered also as a necessary part of his establishment, like his house-steward or butler, to occupy her proper position at his table; for his whole thoughts and time were so thoroughly occupied with political business and party intrigues during the session of parliament, that he had few opportunities of meeting her until the dinner hour; and during the recess a long succession of guests were invited to Marwood, to fill up the vacuum in discussing and propounding measures for the future consideration of the government, of which he was an ever active, although not a place-holding supporter, and favoured with their confidence on all matters of importance.

It is almost needless to say in what light he was regarded by Lord Lessingham, who expected through his influence to obtain that advancement in the peerage which Lord Purvis steadily declined himself.

When dancing commenced, Hugh, as a

matter of course, solicited Florence as his first partner, asking Miss Norman for his second ; and it so happened that they took their position not far from where Lord Purvis was sitting with his ally (both considering hopping about a ball-room inconsistent with their dignity and mature age), when the former, struck by the extreme grace and beauty of Florence, could not forbear asking her name. This was readily given ; and a little other information as to family, &c., gratuitously offered.

“ An only child, then, Lessingham, and educated at home, I conclude, under her mother’s supervision ? ”

“ Exactly so,” was the reply ; “ but it was rumoured she was engaged, or nearly so, to Sir Everard Hilston, who, however, denies any serious intentions, saying he merely flirted with her, as he has often before with other pretty girls, to pass an idle hour or two.”

“ She has not the manner or appearance of a flirt, Lessingham, and is too young and too well educated, I should conceive, to be much versed in that game.”

“ Perhaps so,” he replied, “ although in my

opinion flirting is as natural to girls as skipping to lambs."

"Then the greater merit to those who do not practise it, Lessingham; but as you are acquainted with Mrs. Seaton, I should like an introduction to her;" which being soon after effected, Lord Purvis continued sitting near her for some time, displaying his conversational powers to great effect, in the course of which it was discovered that he had known Captain Seaton before he entered the army, when a boy at Eton; and this led to a more friendly feeling between them, when Florence returned, leaning on Hugh's arm, and at his lordship's request was introduced to him. He had scarcely spoken, however, ten words to her, when her hand was again claimed for the next dance; and it was not till sitting near her at supper that Lord Purvis had an opportunity of again addressing her. From that time, when dancing recommenced, his eye was riveted on her movements and manner to her several partners, to detect, if possible, the least appearance of, or approach to flirtation; but none could he discover—not even a look of

levity, although cheerfulness and good humour beamed on her faultless features.

Lord Purvis was not the person to impart his thoughts on marriage or any important subject to his host, who had two fashionable daughters still on hand ; but telling him he had discovered in Mrs. Seaton the widow of an old schoolfellow, said he should call upon her, from respect to his memory.

Sir Everard felt rather uncomfortable that evening, on hearing Florence so much admired, and regretted now his late conduct towards her, which Bertie informed him had been most severely commented upon by all who knew her. “In short, Hilston,” he added, “it will be lucky for you if her cousin, Major Sinclair, does not hear of these squibs of yours.”

“Only said in joke, Bertie.”

“The Major won’t treat it as a joke, you may depend, Hilston ; and Hugh Fitzwarine only wants the opportunity of making a hole through your waistcoat.”

“What is she to him, I should like to know ?” retorted Hilston.

“Ask him the question, and you will know soon enough.”

Miss Medwyn was graciously pleased to renew her acquaintance with the young Abbot, and, after dancing with her, she presented him to her mother, who, knowing his high descent and good connections, received him most favourably. In truth, Hugh had attracted her particular notice that night, as one of the most handsome and aristocratic-looking young men in the room.

The festivities were now drawing to a close, and the company began to separate, much to the regret of Charlotte Norman, who, having obtained plenty of partners, felt disinclined to quit the gay scene until the last moment. Hugh, however, observing the pale looks of Florence, had ordered the carriage to be in attendance, which being announced to Mrs. Seaton, the young ladies were obliged to comply with her wish to return home, retiring to rest in broad day, or rather morning light; and Hugh, feeling fevered and excited by the heat of the rooms, preferred riding home, saying he should be in time for his mother’s breakfast.

There is scarcely a pleasure in life, so called, which does not leave a sting behind it ; and Florence, unaccustomed to dissipation, awoke, after fitful dozings and broken dreams of the past night's events, with a bad headache, which continued until the dinner-hour ; and Hugh, from the same cause, was unable to call till the next day, when he proposed a good walk to the young ladies, to restore the roses to their cheeks, after which he was obliged to return to the Abbey.

About three o'clock the same afternoon, Lord Purvis called at Forest Lodge, and was ushered into the drawing-room, where Florence was sitting alone, engaged in painting some flowers, by whom he was received with her usual grace, and cheerful smile ; and Mrs. Seaton having gone for a drive with Charlotte Norman, he spent a very agreeable hour in her company, greatly pleased with her sensible remarks on various subjects, which he proposed with a view to draw forth her opinion, so as to gain an insight into her natural disposition and character.

On rising to leave, Florence expressed her

regret at her mother's absence, on which Lord Purvis said he would take an early opportunity of calling again, when he hoped to be more fortunate in finding Mrs. Seaton at home.

On her mother's return, Florence informed her of Lord Purvis's visit, speaking in high terms of his very agreeable manners and superior conversation, so unlike the every-day gossip of their neighbours on common-place topics.

“ Ah! no doubt, my dear,” remarked Charlotte, when Mrs. Seaton had left the room, “ he is a man of the world, and has travelled far and wide, and, I was told, is quite *au fait* in debate, public and private; and as to the latter, it is reported, having broken his first wife's heart by bad treatment and worse temper, he is now looking out for a second victim. A great many of these very agreeable, talented men are perfect Blue-beards in their own homes, my dear Florence, so don't be persuaded by this sallow-faced little man to become Lady Purvis.”

“ Such an idea never entered my head,

Charlotte, and I should think him the last person any girl would fall in love with.”

“No accounting for these things, Florence, since I knew a very beautiful girl, with good sense also, deluded into marrying one of the plainest men I ever saw, and old enough to be her father, by his plausible speeches and persuasive manner, and he turned out one of the greatest brutes afterwards that ever existed in the form of man.”

“Well, Charlotte, this may be very true ; but handsome men have bad tempers as well as plain ones, I suppose.”

“No doubt, my dear ; but even then they cannot look quite hideous ;—however, as far as I am concerned, a husband, young or old, good-looking or bad-looking, shall never palm his bad humour upon me. With you, my dear girl, it would be quite a different affair ; so don’t take a leap in the dark before you are out of your teens ;” saying which, she ran up to her room to change her dress, and left Florence rather puzzled at such strange advice from Charlotte Norman, who had previously expressed the very opposite opinions.

Two days after, Lord Purvis paid another visit to Forest Lodge, when he found Mrs. Seaton and Charlotte at home, Mrs. Fitzwarine having taken Florence for a drive in her pony-carriage ; and during his lordship's stay, Mrs. Seaton was struck with Charlotte's very quiet, unobtrusive deportment, and the total absence of levity from her conversation. Lord Purvis felt chagrined at not seeing Florence, for whom his visit was more especially intended ; but having expressed, on returning to Maesmuir Castle, a desire to become better acquainted with Mrs. Seaton, Lord Lessingham took the hint as intended, and an invitation was dispatched the following morning by Lady Lessingham for the honour of Mrs. and Miss Seaton and Miss Norman's company at dinner three days after. This was obtained not without altercation between her proud ladyship and generally submissive lord.

“ You appear to forget, my lord,” retorted the lady, on being asked to send the invitation, “ that you have two daughters unmarried, and that Lord Purvis is intent on forming a second matrimonial alliance.”

“Not in the least, my dear ; but knowing Purvis’s views on this subject, I am quite satisfied, from what escaped him at Bertie’s party, that he will not a second time select a girl of fashion, and least of all one of your daughters. That point being clear to me, it is, as you ought to know, my object to render his stay here as agreeable as possible, my future prospects depending on his lordship’s interest—through whose means, also, I expect to obtain a lucrative appointment under Government for your son George. Lord Purvis is not the man to be turned from his purpose ; and if, as you think, he has taken a fancy to Miss Seaton, we cannot alter his determination.”

Lady Lessingham tossed her head. But the note was written, couched in polite terms, immediately dispatched, and the invitation accepted. It is unnecessary to pass any comments on this very stiff, formal dinner-party, or the pointed *hauteur* of the Miss Medwyns towards Florence during the whole evening, which Lord Purvis noticed by a dark, malignant scowl ; but the quiet, lady-like demeanour of Florence, under conduct she could

not but feel, tended to increase Lord Purvis's admiration of her in a tenfold degree, who, from his keen insight into the human character, coupled with rapid decision in matters of importance, had already decided in his own mind that Florence Seaton was precisely the person for his second wife. Accordingly, the next morning, at an earlier hour than usual, to find Mrs. Seaton at home, he again made his appearance at Forest Lodge, when, the two girls having gone for a walk, he had the opportunity of explaining the object of his visit at such an unfashionable hour, expressing his admiration of Florence in the most glowing terms, and soliciting Mrs. Seaton's approval of his suit. He would not presume on so recent an acquaintance with her to make an immediate proposal of marriage, but deeming it his duty first to make her acquainted with his intentions, he begged for permission to call at Forest Lodge, in the hope of rendering his addresses agreeable to her daughter.

Mrs. Seaton, although rather surprised at this unexpected *dénouement*, said she felt much flattered by his lordship's preference for her

child, and should be happy to receive him at her house on a friendly footing ; but that, as Florence was still so young, and had seen very little of the world, she must candidly avow her disinclination to influence her in a matter of such importance to her future happiness.

Lord Purvis, having thanked Mrs. Seaton in the most courteous terms for her candour and kind concession to his wishes, soon after took his leave, much gratified with his favourable reception. During the ensuing fortnight, his lordship's calls were so frequent, that Florence began to think he intended to become her father-in-law, from his cordial reception by her mother, and kind attentions to herself, and could not forbear, one day when alone with her, playfully alluding to the subject.

“ My dearest child,” replied Mrs. Seaton, “ you entirely misapprehend Lord Purvis's motives, which are to render himself acceptable to you, not to myself.”

“ Oh ! really, mamma, you must be now joking.”

“ Indeed I am not, my dear child ; he has

candidly confessed to me his preference for you above all the young ladies he has ever known, and has asked my permission for the opportunity of improving his acquaintance with you, to which I could make no reasonable objection."

Florence looked astounded at this unexpected information, when her mother said she did not wish in any way to bias her feelings in favour of Lord Purvis, although in every respect so desirable a connection, with rank, wealth, and such superior talents.

"Indeed, my dearest mother, although this is very true, he is a person I could never love; and you know, independent of his almost forbidding looks sometimes, from which, I am sure, he has a haughty, bad temper, he is old enough to be my father; and from such disparity in years, even were he ever so amiable, little happiness could be expected from the want of unison in feeling and affection between us."

Mrs. Seaton endeavoured to combat her daughter's ideas on these points, and concluded by advising her to consider seriously

the many advantages she would derive from such an advancement, with rank, riches, and every comfort in life, before giving Lord Purvis a decided refusal, should he propose.

Florence, throwing her arms round her mother's neck, thanked her for her kind advice, and the still kinder consideration shown to her own feelings, when the subject was discontinued.

END OF VOL. I.

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